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BLANCHE OF NAVARRE.

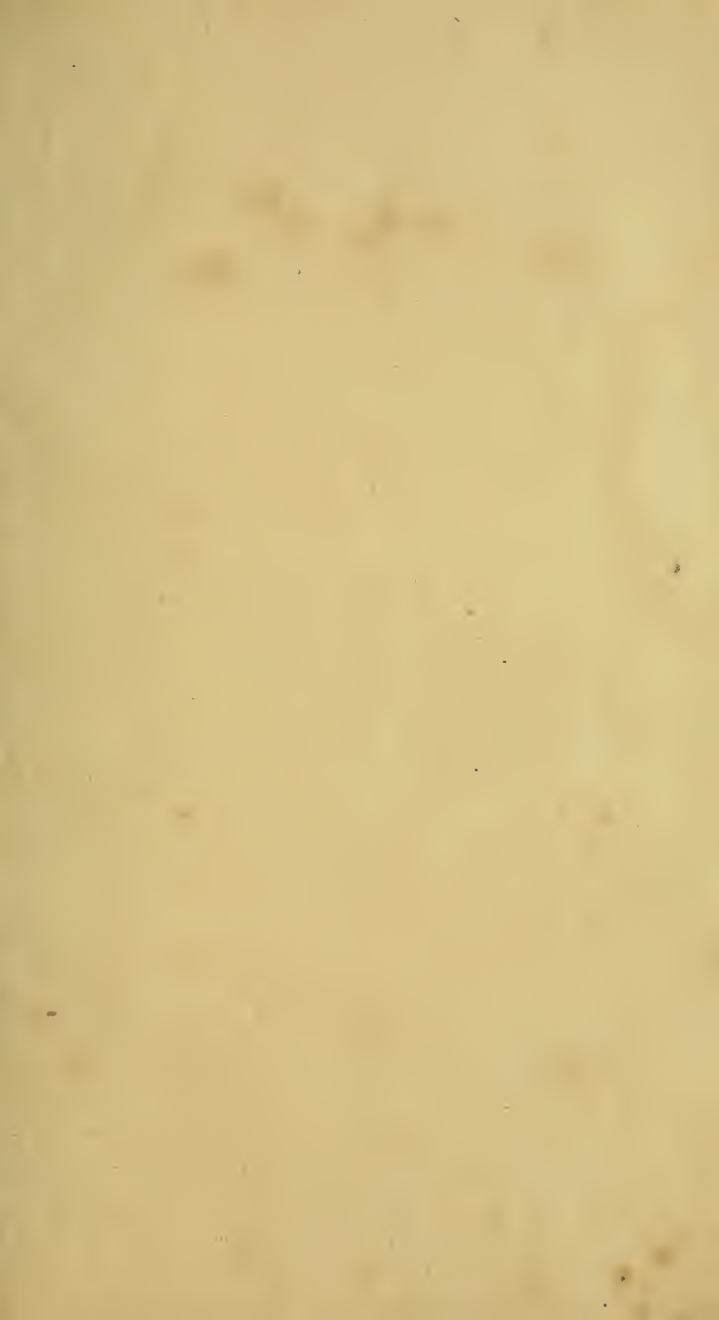
A PLAY.

BY

G. P. R. JAMES, ESQ.,

AUTHOR OF "THE GENTLEMAN OF THE OLD
SCHOOL," "THE HUGUENOT," &c.

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BLANCHE OF NAVARRE.

A PLAY.

BY

G. P. R. JAMES, ESQ.,

AUTHOR OF "THE GENTLEMAN OF THE OLD SCHOOL," "THE HUGUENOT," "THE GIPSY," "THE ROBBER,"
&c., &c., &c.

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1839.

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DEDICATION.

TO

THOMAS NOON TALFOURD, ESQ.,

&c., &c., &c.

MY DEAR SIR,

YOU have so many claims on personal regard, as well as on public admiration and respect, that I hardly know whether to address this little work to you as to one from whose legal talents I have received important professional aid ; one from whose noble poetry I have derived unmixed delight ; or one to whom I, as well as every literary man, am deeply indebted for a gallant, and, I trust, successful, struggle in assertion of our undeniable rights against the virulent and iniquitous opposition of a greedy and devouring faction.

Suffer me, however, to make this the vehicle for expressing many various feelings towards you ; and accept this first attempt at dramatic composition, as a testimony of gratitude for your excellent legal advice upon a difficult question, of esteem for your generous and persevering efforts in behalf of the literature of your country, of admiration for the poet, and regard for the friend.

Believe me, also,

Ever yours faithfully,

G. P. R. JAMES.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

MEN.

PHILIP, KING OF NAVARRE.

DON FERDINAND DE LEYDA.

THE CHANCELLOR.

FRANCIS, COUNT OF FOIX.

DON JOHN.

Two Navarrese Lords.

Officer of the Guard.

Priest.

Jailer.

French and Navarrese Noblemen, Pages, Surgeons,
Attendants, Soldiers, &c.

WOMEN.

ISABEL OF VALOIS, Queen of Navarre.

BLANCHE, Princess of Navarre.

Maids, Ladies, Attendants, &c.

BLANCHE OF NAVARRE.

ACT I.

SCENE I.

A Gothic Hall in the Palace of Pampeluna, with large folding doors in the back scene, and decorations as for a royal bridal. Loud acclamations from without heard as the curtain rises.

PHILIP, *King of NAVARRE*, BLANCHE, *Princess of NAVARRE*, DON FERDINAND DE LEYDA, *Commander of the KING'S Guard*, the CHANCELLOR, Nobles, Ladies attending on the Princess, &c., &c.

BLANCHE.

HARK, how they shout! Hark, Philip! She is here, Thine Isabel! thy bride! Fly we to meet her!
I long to see the bright reality
Whereof a shade has reach'd us.

THE CHANCELLOR (*detaining the KING, who has taken a step towards the gates*).

Gracious lord!

Forget not a just pride in too much love!
We have no rule that monarchs go like grooms,
Unto their palace gates, and wait unbonneted
Their lady's coming. Those who abjure their state
To gratify a woman, soon will find
They give themselves a ruler, not a bride.

KING.

That must not be! and yet I fain would go,
My heart beats high to welcome her. [*Shouts without.*]

BLANCHE.

Oh, the chill shackles of this icy world!

(*To the CHANCELLOR.*)

Frown not, my lord, I know they may be needful.
I know that wholesome customs are the guards
Which keep the monarch, Reason, from the pressure
Of the wild crowd of passions and caprices
That throng around him in the human heart;
But let not guards be masters! Nevertheless,
Doubtless your counsel is discreet and timely!
And now, to end dispute, lo! here she comes,
And, in the radiance of her beauty, sweeps
All clouds away.

[*As she speaks, the great doors in the back scene open.*

*Enter ISABEL of Valois, the French Ambassador,
FRANCIS, COUNT OF FOIX, and other French nobles-
men, with guards, attendants, &c. While the KING
and CHANCELLOR meet and welcome the QUEEN,
BLANCHE and the rest remain in front.*

DON FERDINAND DE LEYDA (*gazing at ISABEL*).

Lovely, indeed! Yet how
That nostril curls! How that lip's rubied bow
Seems bent to give a wound!

BLANCHE (*remarking her*).

She gazes on him
As if she knew him not; nor could divine
Which is her promised husband, which the king
Of her new land! She will not—no, ah, no!—
She cannot cloud this bright day with one look
Unworthy him or her! No! Now, she smiles!
'Twas but the dizzy brain and beating heart
Made bright eyes sightless, and made warm lips cold.
Lo! now she meets his greeting fondly too!
My heart's at rest. [*Goes forward to meet ISABEL.*

DON FERDINAND DE LEYDA.

So were not mine, were I the king!
That eye's too keen and fearless for a bride;
And the full lip quivers with a quick spirit,
But not with dread of these new scenes and faces,
Nor at the change from maiden into wife.
If e'er I wed, may I find humbled looks
In her I love, and warm but timid smiles.

BLANCHE (*advancing hand-in-hand with ISABEL*).

Nay, lady, nay! My tongue and heart are one.
Sweet Isabel, there's not within my breast
One pulse but bids you welcome. In these halls,
From the calm morning of my life till now,
'Tis true, I've reign'd supreme. Childhood's command
O'er the fond parent's heart was my first sway;
I ask'd, and all was granted. Next, the love
Of this dear brother, gave into my hands
A sceptre of sweet rule—

ISABEL.

Thy life has been

Most happy, then?

BLANCHE.

Happy, indeed! The people
Were friends, were brethren to me. Hitherto,
Queen of myself, ruler of all around,
If ever care I felt, the fault was mine,
And my imperfect nature's. Thou art come,
And all is changed! No longer mistress here:
My brother's halls are thine, sweet Isabel.
His realm, his subjects, nay, his heart itself,
Owns other sway; and, in the happy home
Where my glad childhood sported uncontroll'd,
There stands beside me one, by whom henceforth
The hourly current of my after-life,
Each thought, each feeling, every act and word,
Must be affected. To thy brow I look
As to the sky. Its smiles and frowns, my sister,
Are now my sunshine or my storms.

ISABEL.

Fear not!

No storms, I trust, shall ever mar thy fate;
And, for the rest, we'll use our utmost power
To compensate for that we take away.

BLANCHE.

Think not I grudge it. If my brother's hand,
When, Isabel, to thee he gives that sway
Which once was mine, gave thee a thousand realms,
I'd think my loss repaid by gaining thee.
Nor, looking on thee, do I doubt my fate.

In the clear liquid lustre of thine eyes
 I see the limpid surface of a fountain,
 Beneath which lie deep, sweet, and living wells :
 And, poor though I be now, I fain would add,
 To all my brother gives, one other gift.

ISABEL.

What is that ?

BLANCHE.

The love of a true heart !
 I fain would love thee ; but I must not say
 I love thee yet, for yet I hardly know thee.
 But, if I judge aright, the time will come
 When thy bright looks, translated into deeds,
 Shall win all love in this my native land ;
 And Blanche and Isabel, with hearts entwined,
 Shall walk in strong affection through these halls.

ISABEL.

Doubt it not, sister ! doubt it not ! But, lo !
 Here comes your brother ; now my lord and king—

THE KING (*who has been speaking behind with the
 Chancellor, Ambassadors, and Lords of France, ad-
 vances with them*).

Bringing to greet you our gay lords of France.
 And here is one whom, with especial grace,
 Welcome I pray : a cousin of our house.

BLANCHE.

Which ? Which is he ? That tall and high-browed man
 With snowy hair ?

ISABEL.

Fy ! that is the ambassador.
 Oh, no ! He with the lordly air, whose step
 Seems destined to shake worlds. Yet in the dance
 That step is lighter than the hillside wind.
 Is he not, gracious Blanche ?

BLANCHE.

Gracious indeed !

ISABEL.

Cousin of Foix, to this fair lady's smiles
 We have commended you. Our sister Blanche

Cannot have ears so guiltless of all news
As never to have heard of your achievements
In lists of love and war. Francis of Foix !

THE COUNT OF FOIX (*kissing the hand of the Princess*).
Bright lady, by your leave ! [*Aside.*] So cold an air !
[*Aloud.*] Have I offended ? Or that chilly look—

BLANCHE (*passing on*).

Sir, I know no offence. Sweet Isabel,
Let us seek breath ! In this too crowded hall
The heat oppresses. Near there is a room,
Whence, from the windings of our Arga's stream
And sunny lands, rich in all fruits and flowers,
The eye may reach the snow-crown'd Pyrenees,
Looking like age o'ertopping jocund youth.
Yet are their ancient heaps the nearer heaven.
Come, Isabel.

KING.

Give me your hand, dear lady !
[*Exeunt all but the COUNT OF FOIX, who lingers, musing.*

COUNT (*speaking with long pauses*).

So lovely, yet so cold ? Hypocrisy !
There's fire beneath that snow ! Yet not in scorn
She seem'd to speak : not like the haughty dame
Inured to man's pursuit, and taught by art—
A skilful trader—to affix high price
To not unwilling smiles : to frown from use,
E'en while she laughs at heart. There was a look
Of condemnation, but just touch'd with grief ;
Which, of earth's sympathies the rosy hue,
Gave to the chiller purity of heaven—
It matters not ! All women may be won ;
And she's worth winning. [*Enter DON FERDINAND.*

DON FERDINAND.

Linger you, my lord ?
How you stay'd here unmark'd, I cannot tell.
The eager bridegroom to the altar's rite
Now leads his lovely bride. You must be there,
Lest men should say the Count of Foix regrets
To see his cousin Isabel's fair hand
Bestow'd upon another.

THE COUNT (*laughing*).

Joy be theirs!

I thought not of her, though a fairer dame
Ne'er quitted France to wed a stranger prince.
But you have many marvels here, my lord:
A city in a paradise. I think
Some angels, too, in Eden, who may well
Dazzle our eyes, and give us food for musing.
But let us go!

DON FERDINAND.

This is the way, my lord! [*pauses.*

In high festivities, the court this night
Rejoices with the king: but on the morrow
I trust the noble Count of Foix will spend
A revel with the poor lords of Navarre
In my unworthy house.

COUNT.

Most gladly, sir.

But, hark! I hear the sound of many feet
Buzzing along the passage. Let us not
Miss this high ceremony.

[*Exeunt.*

SCENE II.

A banquet. The house of DON FERDINAND DE LEYDA, a raised gallery filled with musicians. DON FERDINAND; the COUNT of FOIX; Lords of France and of Navarre, seated at supper. Attendants, &c. Gay music and song from the gallery while the party sup.

SONG.*

WOMAN'S LOVE.

Woman's love! Woman's love!
What shall liken woman's love
On earth below; in heaven above
What is there so sweet?

* While the song is sung, much talking and laughter at the supper-table. The song should be for a bass voice.

The spring bird's lay may sooth the ear,
 The eye may love the sunshine clear,
 The violet to the scent be dear,
 But where do all sweets meet?

Refrain.

Woman's love! Woman's love!
 Joins earth's joys with joys above.

Ambition's toils are idle pain;
 Avarice but little gain;
 Learning—Solomon's was vain!
 Glory—but a dream.
 But there's one thing sweeter far
 Than all beneath the evening star,
 Brighter than the lightnings are,
 When in the west they gleam.

Refrain.

Woman's love! Woman's love!
 Joins earth's joys with joys above.

DON FERDINAND, COUNT of FOIX, *Navarrese and French*
lords advance, laughing and conversing.

COUNT.

Nay, I will give no names! I still have held, Don Ferdinand, that he who really wins in love's soft game, may tell his winnings, but will spare the loser. The braggart who repays a woman's smile by giving up her name to one light laugh, is a cracked cup, framed of some villanous clay, unmeet to hold the generous wine of love.

A LORD OF NAVARRE.

And yet they tell us that the Count of Foix still flies his falcon at the highest game.

COUNT.

And wherefore not, Don John? Every pursuit has its ambition. In the field of war, our lance is aimed at the renowned shield, our sword seeks out the highest crest; and in these softer lists, there still is glory in a high emprise. Show me the loveliest, noblest, coldest, most secure in station, nature, breeding, and disdain, and she is thenceforth the game that I pursue, to conquer her, or to become her slave.

DON JOHN (*laughing*).

An Alcibiades! A very Alcibiades!

DON FERDINAND.

There's some one in his thoughts e'en now! Look how he smiles! A queen, an empress, or a cottage maid: I'll drink to her bright eyes whoe'er she be. Bring me some wine! Most noble Count of Foix! Here's the next lady on your lists of love! [*Takes a cup of wine from an attendant.*]

COUNT.

Well, be it so! Give me the cup. [*To attendants.*] Health to her, also, lords! Blanche of Navarre!

[*The nobles of Navarre draw back from him suddenly, some laying their hands upon their swords.*]

DON JOHN.

This must not be! or did I hear aright?

ANOTHER LORD (*speaking almost at the same time*).

My Lord of Foix! My Lord of Foix!

A THIRD LORD (*drawing his sword*).

Dare he name the Princess Blanche?

DON FERDINAND DE LEYDA.

Hold back, my friends! hold back! He is my guest! Fear not, good gentlemen of France. The laws—the laws of hospitality are here stronger than fetters.

DON JOHN.

But mark, Don Ferdinand—

DON FERDINAND.

He knew not what he said! He cannot know
The hearts of this whole people. Good, my lord,
[*To the COUNT*]

Gladly we welcome you to this our land,
An honour'd stranger, gay, renown'd, and brave,
Skill'd in the arts of pleasure as of war;
Undaunted, courteous, liberal: but mark
One caution! Hold with reverence due
The name of one just mention'd somewhat lightly.

She is our native princess ; has grown up
Under our eyes amid the love of all ;
Loved past all love ; with that pure noble love
Which elevates its object to the throne
Of the high heart ; that love which to the good
Is natural towards the good ; and which,
E'en in the bosoms of the bad, has power
To plant one holy thing.

THE COUNT (*turning away with a smile*).

A somewhat long

Discourse.

DON FERDINAND (*vehemently*).

Smile not, Sir Count, for we will bear
No trifling with her name ! Speak not of her
With one vain hope. Her thoughts are bright and fair
As her fair face ; pure as a saint's in heaven
From aught of evil. Smile not, sir, I say,
Although *my lip* speaks praise of purity !
We see her actions, know her every deed.
Where is there sorrow, that she is not found
With aid and consolation in her train ?
Where is there virtue, honour, where good deeds
To which the tongue of Blanche refuses praise ?
Who is there wrong'd, to whom her voice denies
Its music eloquence, to plead the cause
Of the oppress'd, how great soe'er may be
The evil-doer ? Holy is her name m
To the ears of those who see her every day.
I've known her sit beside the bed of death,
In all the livid horrors of the plague,
And bend her bright head o'er the ghastly sick,
Without one look but pitying sympathy ;
And yet, I tell thee, she would shrink as loathing
From thee and thy loose love, as from a snake,
Or any other foul and noisome thing !

COUNT (*warmly*).

How now, Don Ferdinand ! This is too much !
These shackles of your hospitality,
Which you but now vaunted so mightily,
Afford your tongue wide range.

[*He pauses and recovers himself.*

B

But let it be :
 I will not take offence ; though once again,
 With injury to no one, I will say [*Raises the cup.*
 Blanche of Navarre ! Those who in simple words
 Find evil meanings, make them ! Let no broils
 Mar our fair revelry. Don Ferdinand,
 There is my hand. Let us forget these things !
 I'll claim another cup before we part !

DON FERDINAND.

More wine ! More wine there ! [*They bring wine.*

COUNT.

Here, my gallant friends ! [*taking a cup.*
 Here's to all loves, past, present, and to come !
 And more than all to yours, Don Ferdinand.
 Ha ! Am I right ? A lady with bright eyes,
 At last night's ball, robed in dark purple, one
 With swanlike throat as fair as ivory,
 Rising, like snowdrop from the early grass ;
 And on her brow a pearl, that dusky look'd
 By that it rested on ? Her beaming eye
 Follow'd your steps, as waits yon brilliant star
 Upon the evening moon. [*Points to the casement.*

But by my faith

[*giving back the cup.*

This juice is potent, or my brain is weak,
 And I must bid good-night. Come, cousin d'Albret !
 Come, good Lord of Roye ! Farewell, kind nobles !
 Don Ferdinand, farewell !

DON JOHN.

We go too, my lord.

Farewell, De Leyda !

[*They take leave ceremoniously, and exeunt all but Don*
 FERDINAND.

DON FERDINAND (*alone*).

Does this proud Count of Foix bear words like these ?
 Then, by my life, he shall hear more of them,
 Or else unsay this wild conceit and pledge—

Re-enter the COUNT, speaking loudly to those without.

COUNT.

'Tis but my glove ! I had forgot my glove !

Dismount not, I entreat ! I come ! I come !

[*Grasps the arm of DON FERDINAND, and lowers his voice a little.*]

We know each other, my good lord ! Such words
Require like deeds ! Where shall it be ? and when ?

DON FERDINAND (*rapidly*).

At dawn to-morrow. In the meadows past
The Taffalla gate.

COUNT.

There can be no need
To mingle others with this light dispute. [*They whisper.*]

DON FERDINAND.

So be it, then ! With lance and sword, my lord,
And but a single page to hold the horses.

COUNT.

So, so ! Oh, here's the glove ! Good-night, once more,
Gallant Don Ferdinand. I come, fair lords !
The night is fine. [*Going.*]

DON FERDINAND.

Nay, I must see you forth. [*Exeunt.*]

ACT II.

SCENE I.

An Observatory, with a large window as near the front as possible, showing gradually the rise of day. Astrological Instruments scattered about.

The PRIEST alone, turning from the window, and advancing.

PRIEST.

'Tis emptiness and vanity ! Yet, strange !
We cling to the delusion ; pass the night
In watching stars, that make us no reply !
But no : perchance we seek them not aright.

They have a voice, and speak if we would hear.
 They tell us of infinity and power,
 And ruling might immeasurably vast :
 They speak our littleness, yet make us feel
 Great in Almighty love.

[*Muses.*

I'll be no more
 The creature of vain systems; but, removed
 From all these idle things, will pass the hours
 Of my remaining span in solitude
 Amid the mountains, seeking better knowledge
 From that eternal book, where all the words
 Like these (*pointing to the stars*) are lights from heaven.
 [Goes to the window and opens the casement.
 Who's there?

Enter BLANCHE and Maid.

BLANCHE.

'Tis I,
 Father; you promised me to read the stars,
 And tell me what the future may portend
 Towards Navarre.

PRIEST.

Who shall tell aught of that?
 On earth, whichever way we turn our eyes,
 We are surrounded closely by a cloud,
 A sullen mist, which renders all confused
 E'en close at hand, and veils each distant thing
 In rayless darkness; yet, as we advance,
 Gives the same space to sight, at every step
 Disclosing new events, first faint and dim,
 Then clearer, till they touch us as they pass,
 Whirled through the narrow circle of our ken.
 The while to guide us, reason holds a torch,
 Dim and ill-lighted, o'er the one right path,
 And fancy, in the cloud, bearing her lamp,
 Flits round, like wildfires on some midnight moor.

BLANCHE.

But not long since you did believe, good father,
 That stars are link'd to human destinies,
 And could lead those who read their lessons right
 Through the dark future.

PRIEST.

I've learn'd better now!
 Lady, there is one star, and one alone,

That tells the future. Its interpreter
 Is in man's heart, and is call'd conscience :
 The star, True Faith ; the future that it shows
 Is beyond human life. But let me not
 Pretend to understand you ill : this night
 I've watch'd the course of many a wand'ring orb,
 From the spot whence it rose to where it set.
 One voice it had distinct, the voice of praise :
 But, by the rules of art interpreted,
 The promise of each star, I saw, was peace !
 Peace and tranquillity unto this land,
 Though every earthly thing forebodes a storm—

MAID.

That is to say, he and the stars fell out,
 And the good father, like our giddy world,
 Calls all things false that don't agree with him.

BLANCHE.

Hush ! Thou art malapert !

PRIEST.

Nay, check her not ;
 There's truth in what she says. But, lady dear,
 Have I not cause to fear a coming tempest,
 When with the name of our scarce three days' queen,
 The busy world—

BLANCHE (*turning towards the window, and then gazing out*).

Hush, sir ! No more, no more !
 Oh that this splendid scene, where God's pure truth
 And universal love, in tides of light,
 Pours, as if fountains of eternal splendour
 Were open'd in the east, to flood the heaven
 With plenty-bearing rays ; counselling man,
 E'en by the very aspect of the sky,
 To deeds of peace, and love, and charity :
 Oh that this glorious scene should be a place
 Of hate, malevolence, and calumny !
 Look where the morning light rests peacefully,
 Like a good father's blessing, on those towers
 By the Taffalla gate ! But what is that ?
 What do those mounted men in the wide meadows ?

PRIEST.

'Tis but two horsemen gone to break a lance

In friendly sport beside the river there.
Ha! one of them is down!

MAID (*running up*).

If that be sport,
Good father, I will never play with you!
'There's death in that fell sport! Lady, away;
Come from the window: you will see blood spill'd.

PRIEST.

Their swords are out, in truth: I'll to the guard,
And warn the captain. [*Exit.*]

BLANCHE.

They fall together! Girl, away, away!
Call the attendants. By St. Helen's steps,
'Tis scarce a furlong; haste! [*Exit Maid.*]

BLANCHE (*alone*).

Oh, bloody Cain,
Thy spirit lives! Whate'er the curse might be
On thee and on thy children, through all time,
This brother-killing rage were curse enough! [*A pause.*
Hark! there are many steps. What may this be,
That late within these walls held joyous life,
And now, perhaps, is silent? (*listening*) 'Tis a groan!
They bear him past the door!

Re-enter PRIEST.

PRIEST.

Sad deeds, indeed!
The Count of Foix, so blithe but yesterday,
So full of life, and of life's rankest weeds—

BLANCHE.

Is dead! Alas! he was unfit to die.
Oh! now I grieve I spoke to him such words
Of cold displeasure, when but yesterday
He laid the prize, which in the tilt he won,
Before my feet; so soon, alas, to die!

PRIEST.

Lady, he is not dead, but sorely wounded.
His foe was one well known in arms,
Don Ferdinand de Leyda; he, too, hurt,
Has been borne dying to his house, they say.

BLANCHE.

Alas! his sister Marian! God spare both
 These rash, unthinking men, to mourn such deeds!
 Many another ill, I fear, must weigh
 On this proud baron's wounded hours, if e'er
 He thinks, or thinks but with a jest,
 On Heaven's offended purity.

Re-enter Maid.

MAID.

The king, your highness, asks for you: the queen
 Is likewise in the hall.

BLANCHE.

I come, I come!
 Another day, good father, you shall tell
 More of those things we spoke upon but now.
 This morning's deed, in truth, rebukes the stars:
 This is no peaceful act.

PRIEST.

There's more to come! [*Exeunt.*]

SCENE II.

*The chamber of the COUNT of FOIX. The COUNT seated
 in a chair in front; the Surgeons leaving him; a Page.*

COUNT.

And now good-day, good-day! I thank you, sirs!
 [*Exit Surgeons and Page.*]
 I've borne worse pain than that! yet, to say truth,
 When the fell iron grated on the bone,
 As forth they drew the lance's head, there came
 An aguish shiver o'er my limbs, that made
 These iron sinews like an infant's. Boy,
 [*Re-enter Page, who approaches him.*]
 Why come you back? Are the chirurgions gone?

PAGE.

Yes, sir; but, ere they went,

They pray'd your lordship to retire to bed
 With all convenient speed, thinking you spoke
 In jest but now.

COUNT (*sharply*).

I jested not! Away!

Get hence! get hence! You but disturb my thoughts.
 [Exit Page.]

I'll not to bed till the sun shows the way.
 How tiresome are these drawling days of sickness!
 Man loses all life's joys. To couch the lance,
 To chase the boar, to court bright smiles from beauty,
 Even to strike the heart-entrancing lute,
 Or follow the *gay science* in sweet verse,
 Fills not the empty hours. Who shall bestride
 My gallant steeds, and put them through their paces,
 While they appear to scorn the jewell'd mead
 That lays flower'd gems before their feet? Grooms!
 Grooms!

Dull grooms, to fret them with their heavy hands!
 I must sit here and muse the livelong day,
 Turn to past scenes with old-man Memory,
 And conjure shadows of extinguish'd joys;
 Joys that leave naught but ashes when burn'd out.
 So holy men would say; and it may be
 Too true! 'Tis certain I ne'er look'd on them
 Save through the lustre-giving light of wine,
 Without a dull weight resting on my heart:
 But who comes here? [Re-enter Page.]

COUNT.

What would you, boy, again?

PAGE.

Sir, a fair company of knights and ladies,
 The king, the queen—but lo, my lord, they come.

Enter KING, QUEEN, and Attendants, with BLANCHE.
The COUNT endeavours to rise.

KING OF NAVARRE.

Nay, rise not, count! We know that you have met
 Somewhat inhospitable welcome here,
 Which shall be question'd strictly.

COUNT.

Nay, not so,

I pray you, sir ! It was a knightly strife,
 Ruled by the laws of chivalry ; a foe
 Worthy a worthier arm than that he met.
 I only fear that he is hurt, my lord.

KING.

If so, he's justly punish'd ! Our fair queen,
 Most lovely and beloved, is not content
 Till she inquires how fares—

ISABEL (*passing the KING and interrupting him*).

How goes it, Francis ?
 Thou art much hurt, fair cousin. By my life,
 Thy cheek is wan, like the chalk countenance
 Of anthem-singing nun. Fy, cousin, fy !
 We'll gather up fresh roses for you soon.

(*In a lower voice, bending over him.*)

Oh that they could be given by smiles or tears ;
 But smiles are fruitless sunshine, tears cold rain !
 Are you much injured ? Do you suffer much ?
 They would not let me come without a train
 Fit for a hawking party.

THE COUNT (*in a low voice*).

'Tis a trifle !

A nothing ! I shall, ere long, be better.

(*Aloud.*)

I thank your majesty, with thanks sincere,
 For this kind condescension ; nor thank less
 This gracious lady (*turning to BLANCHE*), your most fair,
 new sister.

No claim have I upon her charity,
 That she should visit this dim room of sickness,
 And cheer its weary twilight with her smiles.

BLANCHE.

Would, my good lord, that my poor presence here
 Could truly do you good. I trust your hurt
 May not prove dangerous.

ISABEL.

Fy, Count of Foix !
 Your pride, which still has seem'd like a wild haggard
 That falconer's tame down with scanty food,

And wakeful nights, and days in darksome mew,
Till its rough nature softens, is brought down
By these chirurgeons quick as ears of corn
Before the sickle. I have heard you say
That woman was but made to sooth man's hours
In sickness; make him sport like marmosette
On holydays, and be dress'd fine at feasts.

COUNT.

Record not, lady, all the foolish things
These lips have said in other days. 'Tis true
My words have oft in sport belied my heart,
And pastime been the sland'rer of my thoughts.
However proud I be, I'm not so vain
To doubt the Princess Blanche might give her time
More pleasantly, though not more charitably.

BLANCHE.

If charitably, then most gladly, sir,
I would that I could do you any good.
Your lonely hours must needs be dull, I fear,
And may be many.

ISABEL.

Nay, then, help him, Blanche,
To pass those weary hours. Your company—

BLANCHE.

The company of better wits than mine
Was what I meant, dear sister. Books I spoke of;
His page can read them.

ISABEL.

Sermons? canticles?

BLANCHE.

No! The sweet lays of our own sunny land;
The tales of yours; the living poesy
Of men and ages which have past us by,
But, in the spirit of their lofty thoughts,
Live on immortal, and still rule the course
Of thought and human mind, affecting much
All feelings through all time.

If other thoughts

Come too—the thoughts of death and all beyond—

Let them have welcome also. The strong mind
Loves with such mightier themes as those to cope,
And wrestle with great truths, however stern!
Illness and wounds may not prove always evils
If we receive them wisely. I am sure
The sickness of the body often works
The cure of a worse sickness in the mind.

ISABEL (*scornfully*).

She preaches without pulpit! On my life
She'll send the count to sleep. Let's go, my lord!
Pray sister, Father Blanche, is sermon done?
[*Exeunt. ISABEL leading the way angrily.*]

SCENE III.

A Corridor. Enter ISABEL unattended, and, a moment after, from the opposite side, the KING and Attendants.

ISABEL (*apart, as she suddenly sees the KING*).

Ha! I must face it boldly. One right lost,
One privilege foregone, for coward shame,
Makes us deserved slaves!

KING (*with surprise*).

Ha, Isabel!

Whence comest thou, fairest? This way only leads—

ISABEL (*interrupting him*).

To the apartments of the Count of Foix.
Thence come I, my good lord, with a gay heart.
My cousin's all but well; and I must own,
In all a merry life, I ne'er have laugh'd
More joyous than just now. Our saintly Blanche—
Heaven help her little heart!—has preach'd and preach'd,
Till yon mad libertine, the willing slave
Of wine and woman in his hours of health,
Is now all ready for a rosary.

KING.

A happy change, may it but last! The count—

Some inky faults apart—is fill'd so full
Of noble qualities, of generous courage,
That all must grieve to see, mid shining things,
Such murky spots, as flaws in a rich jewel,
And we may wisely wish some potent charm
Might conjure them away.

ISABEL.

Pshaw, Philip! Pshaw!
The count is ill and lonely, moody, sad,
Full of sick fancies and dull ponderings.
There is a saying of a greater sinner,
Who would turn monk when he was sick, but who
Turn'd well and was no monk. Thus will the count.
While he lies withering there, alone and dull,
He'll promise Blanche to be a Capuchin;
But let the surgeons cure him, Blanche will find
He'll take the staff, but leave the beads behind.

KING.

Is Blanche there still?

ISABEL.

Oh, no, we quarrell'd.
Good faith, she rates me as a servant girl!
She went the other way and I went this,
Though she look'd well enough inclined to stay
Beside her pale-lipp'd prisoner. Fare you well!
This is my path. [Going.

KING.

I will but visit him,
And then—

ISABEL.

If more than mine you like his chamber,
Pray stay with him as long as e'er you will.
He seems t' enchant sister and brother too.
Would he had not come here! I had a song
I long'd to sing you; but it matters not.
Adieu, my lord, we'll meet at supper time. [Going.

KING.

Nay, I will come with you.

ISABEL (*smiling*).

Why should you so ?
 Leave not for me affairs of state, my lord ;
 Let not your sage men say the king neglects
 Matters of moment for a gay girl's smile :
 Pray come not, if you come not willingly.

KING.

Oh, I come willingly, my bright one. Go !
 [To an Attendant.
 Inquire how fares the noble Count of Foix ;
 And say, important business has detain'd
 The king, who was half way to visit him. [Exeunt.

SCENE IV.

A Chamber in the Palace. The Count of Foix.

COUNT (*advancing*).

Hail thee, returning health ! I feel the blood
 Run lighter through my veins ; and the soft air,
 Itself a balm to these exhausted limbs,
 Comes burden'd, yet rejoicing, 'neath the weight
 Of flowery perfumes rare ; fine essences,
 Distill'd by the great chymist of the sky
 From all earth's fragrant leaves. How sickness gives
 New edge to the dull'd sense, making it fresh
 As childhood to the taste of simple joys
 Forgotten in the pleasures of the world.

Enter the PRIEST, who is passing across behind.

COUNT (*continuing*).

Would I could keep that freshness now regain'd !
 [Seeing the PRIEST.
 Ah, my good father ! Whither now away ?
 Your foot seems hasty. Are you bent to shrive
 Some dying sinner, or to console the sick
 With angel messages from life's great book ?

PRIEST.

Not so, my lord ; I was but passing by,

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And hasten'd on, hearing you speak aloud,
Lest I might play, unwillingly, eaves-dropper,
And catch your words.

COUNT.

Was I so voluble?

I thought I used but fancy's silent voice,
With my own heart conversing. But, no matter!
Are you not the same who, in my sickness,
During that night when first the fever seized me,
And reason shook on her unsteady throne,
Watch'd the long hours beside my bed, and spoke
Consolatory words?

PRIEST.

The same, my lord.

COUNT.

I thank you, reverend sir, though in good faith
Your visits were not frequent.

PRIEST.

Sir, you seem'd

Impatient of discourse; and most impatient
When the discourse was fittest for my tongue.
Had mortal danger lasted, such impatience
Should have proved no rebuff; but when I found
All danger past, 'twas then—

COUNT.

Was I impatient?

Ah! methinks I was; and I crave pardon.
Yet fretful words, in sickly anguish spoken,
Scare not the wise physician from our couch;
Nor should the impatience of the writhing heart
Drive him away who holds salvation's cup
To the parch'd lip of guilt. The bitter draught,
Given by the leech to cure corporeal ills,
Tastes sweet to that which medicines to the soul—
Repentance. Yet forgive me, holy man,
I am still querulous. I know not why,
There seems a struggle in my heart, confused
And indistinct, like view of distant battle.

PRIEST.

May I, my lord, interpret that dim fight,

And with your spirit standing side by side,
 Like two men on a hill above the field,
 Point out the varied squadrons as they charge;
 Tell you who wins, who loses in the strife,
 And where the fault that casts away the chance
 Of happy vict'ry in a holy cause?

COUNT.

Speak, father! speak! you argue like a soldier.

PRIEST.

Once I was one. Now, then, mark well, my son.
[Points to the side scene.]

See you that mighty host, led on by one
 All kingly in his mien, with air, and words,
 And habit of command; follow'd by troops
 Brilliant and glittering, golden arms, and steeds
 Beating the eager ground?

COUNT.

Nay, I see naught!

But yet I comprehend.

PRIEST.

Search your own bosom!

Now, see that scanty troop upon a hill,
 Plain in their armour, homely in their guise,
 Firm, though not boastful, stern, though calm they
 stand.

COUNT.

And they shall win the day! Such are the men
 That conquer!

PRIEST.

Yes! They conquer if they will.
 No power shall force them from that mighty rock;
 No light-heel'd charge shall shake their firm array;
 No brawling trumpets move their hearts with fear.
 But lo! where lies the cause of strife between
 Those meeting hosts? A castle claim'd by each;
 The one from long possession, though usurp'd,
 And by the other from an innate right.
 Now from the calm bold spearmen on the hill
 Goes down a herald to demand admittance!

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Hark how he speaks ! " Give entrance to your lord,
 To save you from yon tyrant's coming power !
 We offer peace, tranquillity, and calm
 Domestic love, and the bright exercise
 Of all sweet charities, hope, trust, and safety !"
 The other herald comes and cries, " Fling wide
 Your gates ! Make room for Joy ! The walls we'll keep
 With revelry ; the doors we'll close with mirth ;
 Nor sigh, nor tear, nor groan from those without,
 Shall e'er disturb our sports. We'll scatter gems—
 Youth, purity, and innocence—like dust.
 The flowers we tread on shall be human hearts,
 Which, when they wither, we will cast away.
 Fling wide ! fling wide the gates ! and let us in,
 Or we will force the walls and spoil the place !"

COUNT (*vehemently*).

By Heaven, they shall not !

PRIEST.

Nobly said, my lord !
 You're pledged and sworn, henceforth for evermore,
 For Heaven's high King, captain and governor
 Of that besieged fort ! Look to it well ;
 See that no treason enter ; guard the walls
 With wakeful vigilance ; watch gate and bridge ;
 And, ever ready with a hero's care,
 Start into arms to meet the foe's assault.
 That castle is your heart, the foe is vice ;
 Honour and armed truth are friends at hand.
 God's soldier are you ! Go and do your duty !

[*Exit suddenly.*]

COUNT (*musings*).

Yes, I will do it ! Yes, if there be strength
 In any human resolution. Still,
 I doubt myself ; and doubting argues weakness.
 Returning health may bring returning evils.
 It may be sickness tames the heart—or love ?
 Ay, love, perhaps ! Such themes ne'er cross my mind
 Without her image rising up therewith
 Most beautiful ; yet gentle, too, as pure.
 How often I have talk'd of love ! 'Tis strange !
 I would not bring one stain on that bright being
 For all imagination's wildest dream

Could picture or earth give. Oh let it, then,
 Be love or sickness that has taught my heart
 Lessons of nobler thought ; it matters not !
 Yes ! she spoke truly when those sweet lips said
 Sickness is oft a medicine to the mind :
 And why not love a guide ? Whom have we here !
 The queen !

Enter ISABEL, BLANCHE, and two LADIES, their attendants.
 ISABEL.

The prisoner at large again !
 Why, how now, Count of Foix ? You look as scared
 And melancholy as a long-tamed bird
 Broke from its cage, and chased by its wild brothers.
 How now, Francis ?

BLANCHE.

I give you joy, my lord,
 On your recover'd health. The day smiles fair,
 The air is kindly, and the glowing world—
 I speak of nature's world, not man's—is merry
 In Sabbath sunshine. It will do you good
 To feel yourself abroad again ; more good
 To see the cheerful sights this day affords.

COUNT (*to BLANCHE*).

It does me good, indeed, to see such sights ;
 Would all that I shall see were half so gracious.
 [*To the QUEEN.*]

I thank your majesty for all your interest.
 The surgeons fain would tie me to my chamber ;
 But I was prison-sick, and would walk forth.
 There's something in the feel of liberty—

ISABEL (*interrupting him*).

Will ever keep the count a single man ! [*laughs.*]
 What ! you would call wedlock another name
 For sickness, noble count ? I well recall
 One autumn day when you—

COUNT.

Nay, lady dear,
 I said it not of all ! I said, to some—

ISABEL.

You spoke of all—

COUNT.

Ill-sorted matches, true!
 I call'd them living chains that thrall the soul.
 So far I spoke most justly, and no wrong;
 But many another word was said, I know,
 Rash, foolish, heartily repented now!

ISABEL (*peevishly*).

After a bout of sickness, that has left,
 Doubtless, your heart as ashy as your cheeks.
 Some days hence—repentance then forgotten—
 You'll vow all chains were made but to be broken.

COUNT.

I never shall think otherwise than now!
 For I have thought within the last two weeks
 More and more deeply than in years before.
 Shall we, then, choose the vows we like to break?
 If we take bonds upon us, pawn our word
 In contract to some wretched usurer,
 Or pledge our truth to either friend or foe,
 We keep that plighted word; or else are held
 In scorn among the honest and the brave;
 An object of dull shame to our own hearts.
 Shall we then—

BLANCHE (*somewhat impatiently*).

Sister, do you recollect?
 At noon some poor petitioners were told
 To seek you on their suit; and by yon clock—

ISABEL.

Go you, dear Blanche; you know them and their wants
 Better than I do. Be you liberal
 Out of this purse, as you are out of your own.
 [*Exit BLANCHE and one attendant.*]

ISABEL (*continues, aside, looking at the COUNT*).

He gazes after her! And now his eyes
 Are fix'd upon a checker in the floor,
 As if a curious map were there outspread
 To guide him through the wilderness of fate!
 I'll wake him, though! Good-morrow, Count of Foix!
 We have been some time parted! You have gone
 A journey since we met. Nay, colour not,

But come with me, fair cousin. Let us go
Where you may study other, fairer things
Than checkers on the pavement. In my bower
There is a latticed window, looking forth
On the great square, where figures to and fro
Flit in gay garbs, like phantasms in a dream ;
Proud cavaliers, bright women in their veils,
And arch-neck'd horses striking the dull ground,
Impetuous fire and proud obedience mingling ;
While ever and anon some sober friar
Walks slow across, with russet gown, bare feet,
And eyes that steal a twinkling glance askance
At the brown girls, who from the Arga's shore
Bear up the well-bleached linen : while the beggar
Stands by the cross, drinking the mountain air,
Feeding on sunshine, and, content to have
What God gives freely, scarce importunes man.
What, again musing ?

COUNT.

Did I muse, dear lady ?
My mind is weak and wav'ring since this wound.

ISABEL.

Ay, did you muse! Maude, get you on before;
[To the Attendant.
Open the windows, that the summer wind,
Cool'd by the jalousies, may waft him health.
Come, cousin! come! We'll cure this musing fancy.
[Exeunt.

ACT III.

SCENE I.

A great Hall in the Palace, decorated for a high festival; the KING, QUEEN, COUNT of FOIX, BLANCHE of NAVARRE, DON FERDINAND DE LEYDA, Guests, &c., masked Attendants. Dance. The QUEEN and DON FERDINAND DE LEYDA advance.

DON FERDINAND.

Nay, nay! The envious mask in vain attempts
To shroud the matchless beauty of that face.

ISABEL (*in a gay tone*).

Flattery all! Apples to monkeys; nuts
To a squirrel; honey to children; gold
To old age; bubbles to youth and manhood;
To woman, flattery! How should you know
That the face hid behind this sombre case
Is not the countenance of dry old age,
All vein'd and wrinkled, like a well-saved pippin,
In some snug corner of a grandam's chest.

DON FERDINAND.

Could bounding youth with crippled age unite,
Tott'ring infirmity with steps of light,
Threescore regain the roundness of a score,
And ten years added make those graces more.
Yet—

ISABEL.

Nay, no rhyme! None but a prince's fool
Needs a bell'd cap to jingle when wit faints.

DON FERDINAND.

Well, lady, eyes like those which through the mask,
Like twin stars shining through a stormy cloud,
Give promise of a brighter heaven below,
Are ne'er forgotten.

[ISABEL raises her hand to untie the mask.

Nay, remove it not!
Or I must take a reverential tone,
And speak as to a queen.

ISABEL (*unmasking*).

Suppose it there!
I must have cooler air; and speak more freely.
Don Ferdinand de Leyda?

DON FERDINAND (*withdrawing his mask*).

Lady bright!

ISABEL.

I was not mistaken.

DON FERDINAND.

How could you be?
Those bright eyes penetrate all that they see;
None can mistake them that e'er saw their light;
And they ne'er err, whate'er they light upon.
But you were speaking of the Count of Foix
As we came hither from the inner hall.

ISABEL (*eagerly*).

I was, I was! They tell me, you, my lord,
Have seen him often since his wounds were heal'd.
He has grown saintly lately: but I doubt
Sick-bed conversions are with sickness ended.

DON FERDINAND.

And would you have them last?

ISABEL (*turning towards him sharply*).

What mean you, sir?
Yes, I *would* have them last, at least in him!
What other men may do but little matters:
[*Slowly and emphatically.*
He is my cousin, and the Princess Blanche
My husband's sister! Lo, he whispers her!
Love we expect not in a prince's marriage;
And Blanche must share the common fate in that.
But none knows better than yourself, De Leyda,
If rumour speaks aright your cause of quarrel,
That yon gay scoffer at frail hearts pretends
To less, yet greater, honours than her hand.

DON FERDINAND (*after a confused pause*).
How shall I answer, madam?

ISABEL.

Thus, my lord,
You know him! Is he changed? You answer not!
I read the answer on your brow. He's false!
Now, will you serve me? Will you win bright looks
From eyes that you have praised? Give me the means
Of proving unto Blanche, by his own lips,
What are his purposes! Devise some scheme
Whereby her own ears may be witnesses
Against his black designs, or, at the best,
Rash hopes! It is her good I seek!

DON FERDINAND (*after a pause*).
How can I, madam, without treachery,
And violated trust and courtesy?

ISABEL (*impatiently*).
Well, well, Don Ferdinand! Is not all fair—
So lovers say—in love and war? Nay, nay!
Speak no more words, vain words! These eyes, you
said,
Could ne'er mistake! I see they have mistaken!

DON FERDINAND.

Not so! not so! I feel I am a slave,
Tied by more puissant bonds than iron chains.
You have but to command. Nay, not e'en that!
I know your will. Hark how it shall be done:
To-morrow night, when masks are all abroad,
He revels at my house. There is a gallery,
Where minstrels sing, that overlooks the hall,
And from it leads a narrow corridor
Into the dark arcade facing this palace.
The door shall be left open; and my page,
Disguised, shall guide you there. If you can bring
The ears you wish to listen; when I see
Mask'd faces in the gallery, I'll pique
His vanity to utter fiery words
Which shall display his heart.

ISABEL (*eagerly*).

Enough! enough!
[*Seeing* BLANCHE and the COUNT *advancing*.

We are observed conversing here alone.
 Let us go on ; and, as we go, concert
 Those small particulars on which depend
 So often the result of mighty schemes.

[They move on among the crowd, while BLANCHE and the COUNT advance.]

COUNT.

Yes, yes, I know you. Think you I could speak
 To others as I speak this night to you ?
 'Tis not the form alone, though it be fair :
 And that dark mantle does its beauty shroud,
 But as light vapours veil the harvest moon.
 There may be lovely forms enough besides,
 Upon this earth, to dazzle our dim eyes :
 But the warm eloquence of those sweet lips,
 That siren song from pearl and coral cave,
 Where from the heart's depth speaks the spirit forth
 On balmy breath, and gives a soul to beauty,
 None can match that ! No land, no clime, can show
 The union of such loveliness. May I
 Add but a name ?

BLANCHE.

Nay, sir, let us go on.
 You hear the call to supper. Where's the queen ?
 Oh, there ! The grace and dignity there seen
 Can ne'er be masked : let us go on, my lord.

[Exeunt.]

SCENE II.

The same Ballroom as in the last. Servants, &c., carrying across dishes, as if to supper. Enter DON FERDINAND DE LEYDA as from supper. The moon seen shining brightly through a window in the back scene.

DON FERDINAND *(dashing down his mask)*.

Ay ! lie thou there ! And yet I thank thee much !
 Bred up in courts, I ne'er thought days would come
 When I should need a waxen face to hide
 My own too treacherous looks. False-hearted woman !
 Thinks she to cozen me ? " 'Tis for her good !

[Mocking ISABEL.]

She seeks her welfare." Serpent in fair shape,
 I understand you well! Now might this chance
 Be easily improved by wanton skill,
 Till I, your confidant, became your master.
 It were a perilous and stirring game,
 Well suited to my nature and my liking;
 But I will none of it; and will find means
 To counteract your stratagems? Yet why?
 Why should I stop the trial you propose? [Musing.
 Is this man true at heart? I think he is!
 I do believe that her bright looks and words,
 Like Indian suns that shine on barren sands
 Till they breed jewels, have so wrought on him,
 That holier things have gather'd in his heart
 Than e'er were hoped for there. Why, let it be!
 If truth be in him, it will shine forth then:
 If his changed aspect be but the result
 Of evil purposes or moody hours,
 'Twill soon be shown. The one will prove a balm
 To her kind heart, and give it strength and peace:
 And the reverse, if so it should appear,
 Will be a medicine of a rougher kind,
 But not less certain cure. [Exit.

Enter ISABEL hurriedly.

ISABEL.

She pass'd this way,
 And I could see him from the other table
 Watch every look and movement. Lo, she comes,
 Musing and lonely. She seeks solitude.
 He'll follow soon: where can I hide a while!
 [Conceals herself.

*Enter BLANCHE, advancing thoughtfully to the front, with
 her hands clasped.*

BLANCHE.

Could I but trust it! But I dare not trust.
 Is there a traitor in my breast takes part
 Against my honest judgment? Yet her wiles—
 For even I, unwilling as I am,
 Must see those painful wiles with each light art
 To call his looks. Those wiles now scarcely win
 A scanty courtesy from one so courteous!
 Yet can it be? My brother's wife use wiles

To win admiring looks from other men?
 Heaven clear my mind of doubts too terrible!
 It cannot be! No, no, it cannot be!
 She's thoughtless, rash, young, gay, and somewhat forward;
 But oh, not evil! No, no! it cannot be!
[She pauses a moment musing. The COUNT enters behind.]

BLANCHE.

Hark! 'tis his foot! How well I know that step!
 And yet have heard it seldom. Lie thee still,
 Thou beating heart! Coward in garrison,
 Thy terror will betray to other eyes
 The weakness of the place.

COUNT.

You've left the hall,
 Lady, and taken half our light away.

BLANCHE.

The air was sultry and oppressive there:
 Have you not seen, my lord, in some hot days,
 Before a summer thunder-storm, the birds
 Fly from their leafy shades they love so well,
 And, perching on the topmost boughs, sit silent,
 Drinking each breath of air?

COUNT.

Oft have I, lady; and perhaps I could
 Pursue the figure: but my heart's too full
 Of earnest truths to sport itself with fancies.
 I have dared to seek you; yet I scarcely know
 How I may tell you why.

BLANCHE (*calmly, after a pause*).

I cannot think
 There's anything that you may have to say
 Can trouble you to speak.

COUNT.

You judge too coldly!
 There was a time, indeed, that these prompt lips
 Ne'er wanted words to tell a tale of love;
 And the vain consciousness gave ready flow
 To that which pass'd for eloquence. Perhaps

D

The very want of heartfelt truth might yield
 Wild freedom to the unembarrass'd tongue.
 All is now changed ! My earnestness of heart
 Makes my voice falter. Nay, that heart itself
 Is faint beneath the weight of its rich burden.
 Hope, in the deep intensity of love,
 With flagging pinion all unwonted, droops,
 As if the far-off goal could ne'er be reach'd.
 There was a time I could have spoken blithely ;
 There was a time I could have dared all earth
 For objects which, compared to what I seek,
 Are as a pebble to an emp'ror's crown :
 And yet I cannot now find voice to tell
 Hopes on which hang the happiness of life.

BLANCHE (*coldly*).

I can but guess what are those hopes, my lord ;
 But it appears you would regale me now
 With words used many a thousand time before
 To other ears more willing than mine own.

COUNT.

A cold and cutting answer, well deserv'd ;
 Yet—though not ill-deserved—you do me wrong !
 Such words these lips have ne'er before pronounced
 To any being on this breathing earth :
 They are as true as your own faithful heart ;
 As pure as your bright thoughts ; sincere and strong
 As are the purposes of right within
 That heavenly bosom's holiest tabernacle !
 I speak more freely now. A moment since,
 The sense of my unworthiness o'erpower'd
 The strength of hope, the eagerness of love,
 And left me wellnigh voiceless in your presence.
 But, lady, you have made the distance less,
 Narrow'd the gulf between us ; and I dare—
 While owning that I love you more than life—
 To say, Blanche of Navarre, you've done me wrong !

BLANCHE (*at first eagerly, then falteringly*).

Now, Heaven forbid, my lord ! If I wrong'd you
 By one ungenerous thought, no pain that thought
 Could e'er inflict on you would match my grief.
 I have had hope—and—and—it matters not !

COUNT.

Nay, nay ! Speak more ! There is a melody

Hangs on those lips, that, like the nightingale's,
 Is still enchanting, though the song be sad.
 I have presumed too much : yet hear me speak.
 At times your eyes have look'd a bright approval,
 And your smile lit me on a rugged path.
 I know I am unworthy ! You and love
 Have taught me so, for they have taught me, too,
 The love of virtue and distaste of vice.
 You frown'd when first we met : Oh, Blanche ! frown
 still,

Upon that creature of the past. My heart
 Is changed, and I no more the same. View me
 As you yourself have made me. Look upon
 That which is gone as but a masking suit,
 Which cloak'd the visage of my natural mind
 In an unseemly garb. You smile, bright angel ;
 Oh ! smile thou still, to give my weary feet
 Strength, hope, encouragement upon the way
 Which this sweet hand first clearly pointed out.
 Oh Blanche, smile still !

[Takes her hand, which she does not withdraw.]

BLANCHE *(with much agitation)*.

How shall I answer him ?

Plain truth, my lord, which I have ever held
 Better than courtly arts, will not affect
 To misconceive a meaning that is clear.
 But your words startle me ! Let me suppose
 Blanche of Navarre could give no honest hope
 That you might e'er receive her hand ; say you,
 That object gone, you ever could fall back
 From the high path your better thoughts have chosen,
 Into dark errors past and now deplored ?

THE COUNT *(letting her hand drop, and after clasping his
 own together, and musing for a moment)*.

No, Blanche ! oh no ! I know that woman's heart
 Oft wants but an excuse, such as the hope
 Of winning back from wrong, to love and trust.
 But God forbid I should speak words untrue,
 Or seek to win you by a false reply :
 No ! Pure, and beautiful, and good, and bright,
 My truth shall gain you, or my death end all !
 No ! If your heart can ne'er be given to me ;
 If the dark stains of vices gone can ne'er

Be wash'd away, and you cannot forget
 What I have been ; or if, more painful still,
 In other days, love, early love, came nigh,
 And closed affection's gates on all besides,
 Though you should ne'er be mine, I still am yours,
 Yours, Blanche, and virtue's. At your feet I own
[Kneeling.]

That you have conquer'd me, humbled, convinced,
 Amended, and for ever. Memory
 Shall keep me pure if love must be denied ;
 The light from thee, and from thy lips that shone
 Into my soul like sunshine scattering night,
 Shall ne'er depart till life's last sun go down,
 And men pile up the cold earth on my breast,
 Which shall be lighter then for having loved thee.

BLANCHE (*much agitated*).

Rise ! rise ! I fear that the resolves of passion
 Are not more firm than those of a sick bed ;
 Yet I would fain believe—and though no promise
 Ought I to give—and dare say little yet—
 Suffice it, I have never yet seen one,
 I never saw till—till—I am confused,
 And know not what to say. It matters not ;
 I mean my heart is free. It may be won
 By upright honour and plain worthiness ;
 We have all seen the sunshine look more bright
 For a past storm fringing the distant sky,
 So we may hope Heaven looks on earth's repentance,
 And if Heaven, why not man ?

COUNT (*joyfully*).

Enough ! enough !

Beloved, thou hast said enough ! I know
 The noble pureness of thy generous heart ;
 I know, by sad comparison with others,
 The candid truth that sits upon those lips
 Too well, too well to doubt, that these few words,
 Plain, simple, gentle as they are, imply
 A hope, a consolation, nay, a promise.
 Forgive me if I seem too confident.
 Were you less noble, I might feel less bold ;
 But in my boldness I am humble still ;
 Humble, yet undismay'd. Upon myself,
 On my own deeds, I feel, depends my fate.
 Blanche is my own if true unto myself !

Henceforth, most beautiful, I take my way
 As does a pilgrim, with before his eyes,
 High raised on some blue mountain's cloudly brow,
 The shrine to which his steps for ever tend :
 Above him far, but still the end and aim
 Of hope and effort, I'll not doubt my joy ;
 For naught but folly, weakness, or despair,
 Can make me turn or falter on my way.

BLANCHE (*smiling on him*).

Are you so confident ?

COUNT.

I am, beloved !

A monarch's sister and a monarch's child,
 Perchance thou think'st it bold, Francis of Foix
 Prince though he be within his own small land—
 Should raise his daring hopes to one who well
 Might see earth's conqu'rors kneeling at her feet.
 But, Blanche, I tell thee, and I tell thee true,
 That never sovereign of thy house—howe'er
 In arms renown'd—has won a victory
 So great as thine ; I will not say o'er me,
 For that were vanity ; but thou hast gain'd
 A triumph o'er a stubborn human heart,
 Pamper'd with pride, nourish'd with bad success,
 Strengthen'd with idle fame, and leading on,
 In iron habits arm'd, a host of errors,
 Follies, and vices, to wage war against
 One being bright and beautiful, alone,
 Weapon'd with wisdom, panoplied in virtue.

Kissing her hand.

Lady, I speak in all humility :

And when I kiss this gentle hand, 'tis but
 As the chain'd captive, humbled, bending low
 Before the power which brought a wilful heart
 Into subjection.

[*QUEEN passes across behind.*]

COUNT (*continuing*).

But thou start'st—turn'st pale—
 Have I offended ?

BLANCHE (*fearfully and looking round*).

No ! oh no !

There was a shadow slowly cross'd the floor,
 As if between us and yon silv'ry moon,

That through the casement watches us with light
 Like Heaven's own eye—some human form had pass'd.
 There was a stately motion, too : a grace,
 A noiseless dignity, e'en in that shade.
 Could it have been the queen ?

COUNT.

I cannot tell !
 But, if it were, what matters it, sweet Blanche ?

BLANCHE.

Much, much, my lord ! It matters much indeed !
 My part is done, yours still is to be play'd.
 But till you've won—against yourself, not me—
 I must not spend more private time with you.

COUNT.

Fear not, beloved ! If by word or deed
 I e'er forswear this fealty (*kisses her hand*) and homage,
 Trample upon me as a renegade,
 And no bright eyes smile ever on me more !
 Nay, I will go with thee into the crowd ;
 Bid me not hide the love that I am proud of.
 Blush thou this night, sweet Blanche ! Thou never more
 Shalt blush to call me thy companion.

SCENE III.

*Banquet-room in the house of DON FERDINAND DE LEYDA
 (same as SCENE II., ACT I)., Musicians in the gallery.
 COUNT DE FOIX ; DON FERDINAND ; French and Navar-
 rese Nobles, Attendants, &c.*

[*Music.*

DON FERDINAND (*waving his hand to the musicians*).
 Cease ! cease, and leave us ! We now thank you well
 For your sweet sounds, that come like words in visions,
 Waking sensations vague, but vast and fine,
 Without a definite interpreter
 In the corporeal sense. [*Exeunt musicians.*

DON FERDINAND (*to the servants*).

Now quick, dull knaves,
 Set our dessert out here, where we may gaze

From this balcony on the joyous world,
That revels there below in this gay season.

[Servants bring forward tables and fruit].

THE COUNT (*advancing*).

The multitude! I love the multitude,
To gaze upon them in their holyday,
And think, though fate and fortune are resolved
I on another stage should move from them,
There is not one that passes 'neath mine eyes
Who has not some affections in his breast;
Hope, fear, love, sorrow, care, the thought of home,
Kind feelings, aspirations sweet, regrets,
Ay, noble thoughts, too, and ingenuous pride,
That claim a kindred with my heart, and warm
In me the drop of Adam's blood that still
Lingers in veins of nations numberless,
And makes mankind all brothers. Here we're well.

DON FERDINAND (*seating himself so that he can see the musicians' gallery, the COUNT having his back towards it*).

Here can we see the whole! Since last we met
In jovial converse, my most noble friend,
We've pass'd through somewhat sterner entertainment:
And now, once more, I hold you forth my hand,
In friendly greeting, not the less sincere
That we have striven in manly contest too.
We've drained each other's blood; let's drain this cup,
As pledge and warrant of a long-lived friendship.

[The attendants fill the cups of DON FERDINAND and the COUNT, while the QUEEN is seen to draw BLANCHE forward into the gallery above, both masked.]

DON FERDINAND (*seeing them enter*).

But let me add, as well I think I may,
From the bright looks of last night's festival,
The toast we late refused. Now doing right
Unto your amorous eloquence, I give
Your last bright conquest, sir—Blanche of Navarre!

[The Navarrese lords whisper together. The COUNT suddenly sets down the cup, pauses for a moment, and then raises it again.]

COUNT.

With willing heart, noble Don Ferdinand,

I drink to our perpetual amity.
 Born of esteem, and nursed by sturdy strife!
 But would you drink to my last conquest, lords,
 Drink to the mighty conquest o'er myself!
 When last we met, with childish vanity,
 I boasted I would conquer her (whom now
 I scarce dare name coupled with idle words),
 Or she should conquer me. Hers is the victory!
 Give her renown! I own myself o'ercome,
 Humbled, abased; and as I love her still,
 More far than life and all that life can give,
 No hand in all Navarre shall couch the lance
 So willingly as this, against that man
 Who dares but breathe upon her diamond fame,
 And cloud it, but an instant, with suspicion.
 Come, knights and nobles, fill unto the brim,
 And drink with me the good, the bright, the fair,
 An angel's spirit in an angel's form,
 With no one touch of earth save gentleness,
 Queen of all noble hearts!—Blanche of Navarre!

[After the pause of an instant, many of the Navarrese nobles stretch out their hands to the COUNT, drinking to "Blanche of Navarre;" at the same time there is a movement in the gallery above.]

DON JOHN (*pointing to the gallery*).

We have spectators there! A lady faints!
 Let us go succour her!

DON FERDINAND (*stopping him*).

Nay, I beseech!
 Most likely 'tis my sister! Foolish child!
 She has maids there enow. Lo, they are gone!
 We'll close the night with wine.

[The drop scene descends to dumb show.]

ACT IV.

SCENE I.

A Chamber in the Palace. KING and QUEEN seated: the QUEEN half embracing the KING, and weeping. One or two Maids behind. An Officer at each door. A Page on the right side of the KING.

KING (*to the Page*).

Let her be call'd again! But lo! she comes.

[*Enter BLANCHE in a masquerade dress, but unmasked.*

KING.

How is this, fair sister? You still have held
A name of truth and honesty; but now
How comes it, that the simple confidence
Of our fair queen, yet unexperienced
In this land's customs, should be so misled
By you, her husband's sister, nurtured long
In all this people's habits. as to go
With a gay troop, transform'd and mask'd, to sport
Amid the drunken rabble of the city
During the festival?

BLANCHE.

Were you not one?

KING.

I one, my sister? Blanche, you know full well,
In boyhood's lightest days, I prized my state
Well, far too well, to risk my dignity
In ribald sports like those that soil this night.

BLANCHE.

I was assured, my lord, most solemnly,
That you were one. Against my better judgment,
Against each reason I could urge—

ISABEL.

She seeks
To cast the blame on me! You've heard, my lord,

The story of the guard who kept the gates ;
How she return'd alone, behind the rest,
Lingering some half hour in the open streets
On this disorder'd night.

KING.

What say you, Blanche ?

BLANCHE.

When you may hear me, Philip, to an end,
Then will I speak ; and though my heart may burn
To hear the words that I have heard, no sound
Of just complaint shall hurt my brother's ear.
'This night, when you held counsel, I was sought
By your fair bride, and told to make me ready
To join the masking groups that throng the streets.
At once I answer'd, nay ; and farther said,
That it was not the custom of the land
Our royal house should mingle with the crowd
Of idle revellers on nights like these.
But I was told that you, sir, gave consent,
And would be present ; and that your commands—

ISABEL (*vehemently*).

'Tis false ! 'tis false !

BLANCHE.

Let me say on ! If false, the falsehood soon
May be made manifest. My brother's name
Silenced remonstrance : I *obey'd*, not yielded ;
And, enjoin'd to silence till we left the palace,
Went forth with all the rest. In the great square
Some sudden terror seem'd to seize the queen ;
And with a hurried step she drew me through
A long dark passage, grasping tight my wrist,
Till suddenly I found myself above—
In a high gallery—a banquet hall
Thronged full of nobles. Navarrese and French.
They saw me not ; but I heard words enough
To make my heart feel faint, and I had dropp'd
Had not the lady hurried me away.

Ere my bewilder'd brain could gather sense,
She left me in the streets ; and with much fear,
Gibed at by many, treated as a wanton,
Confused in crowds, and almost dead with shame,
Hither I slowly made at last my way.

QUEEN (*rising angrily, and wiping away the tears*).

My lord, if 'tis your will, well pleased to hear
Your bride malign'd, insultéd, and belied,
I will retire, for *I* can bear no more.
I have no art to gloze the simple truth.
My tale is told, and I have naught to add.
If I so left her, how is it that I,
Who know not well this city's narrow streets,
Found my way hither half an hour before her?
I scorn myself that I should say one word
In my defence. Believe which tale you will.
If hers be true, I am unworthy, sure,
To be your bride! I'm ready now, my lord,
To tread my footsteps back to my own land;
And, though I go in grief, but one
Shall wring this loving heart, and with me go
Down to the sad grave, dug by your unkindness,
Regret for losing you, so loved in vain! [*Exit weeping.*]

KING (*to BLANCHE*).

She thinks that you encouraged her to go.

BLANCHE.

Philip, my lips are seal'd; but you and I
Have from the cradle risen up together.
My thoughts have still been open to your eyes,
My actions and my words trying each other.
If e'er, through life, you've known one doubtful tale
Pass from these lips; if ever you have mark'd
One coward falsehood lurking at my heart,
If ever have my deeds belied my speech,
Then doubt me now. But if from infancy,
Until this hour, plain truth has been my comrade,
Guided my thoughts, ruled e'en my childish sports,
Oh, do me justice! And, so help me Heaven,
As all I've said is true.

KING.

I will not doubt thee, Blanche! I do not doubt!
I know that still, whate'er the question was,
Thy heart, from infancy till now, would open
Frank, guileless, like a flower in the sun,
Showing its inmost hues. Nay, grieve not, Blanche!
How oft a word mistaken proves the cause
Of enmity between the noblest!

BLANCHE.

Rarely, sir!
More oft, mistake pretended proves th' excuse
Of hollow reconciliation 'tween the bad.

KING.

Nay, there is some mistake! You I *must* trust;
And Heaven forbid a doubt should cross my mind
Of my sweet Isabel! I see her truth
Shining in her bright eyes. 'Tis error all!
Wait here till I return. I go, dear Blanche,
To reason with her.

[Exit.

BLANCHE (*alone*).

Listen to her, say!
True? Grant it, God, that she, indeed, be true
To thee, my brother! She's been false to me!
That matters little! Be she true to thee,
I can bear all! Alas! alas! my brother,
My heart is heavy for thy future years!

[Attendants *pass rapidly across behind; and she continues looking round.*

There are strange movements! Surely she is ill!
Perchance he has been angry but to hear
His sister's name traduced. He could not fail
To see the falsehood of the tale she told.
Now, Heaven forbid I should be cause of strife!
I'll go and try to sooth him.

[Going.

Enter an OFFICER of the Guard, and Soldiers.

OFFICER.

Madam, I have the king's most high commands
To guard you to the Castle of Llanora!

(BLANCHE *presses her hand upon her heart.*)

Oh, pardon, lady, one to whom the task
Is tenfold punishment for its fulfilment.

BLANCHE.

You are a soldier, sir, and do your duty!
Some time, of course, is given for preparation.

OFFICER.

But one short hour. One maid, too, and no more,
May bear you company; and the king's words

Strictly enjoin'd, if you ask'd speech of him,
That it should be denied.

BLANCHE.

I ask it not !
Forbid it, Heaven, that I should call the blood
Into my brother's cheek ! I go to use,
As best I may, the short time granted me.

OFFICER.

Madam, I fear that I must place a guard
At your apartments.

BLANCHE.

That is strict indeed !
But, be it so ! and yet 'tis very needless ; ;
My heart were guard enough ! [Exeunt.

SCENE II.

*A Room in the Castle of Llanora, with the casement open, and
Mountain Scenery.*

BLANCHE and MAID.

MAID.

'Tis sadly solitary, lady dear,
The cawing of the daws, whirling around
The lonely turrets in the clear mid-air—
Our most familiar sound—is somewhat doleful ;
And even the governor, whom sixty years
Have not made proof, gets drunk each night to scare
From his bedside the fiend called Melancholy.

BLANCHE.

You regret, poor girl, that e'er an idle zeal
Brought you from scenes of gayety and life,
To share confinement in a mountain tower.
Yet whether those who keep me here would dare
To let you back, to prattle of my wrongs
To the fond folk that love me, is a doubt—
More than a doubt, I fear.

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MAID.

It may be so !

But even if they would, I'd thank them little
 For boon that I desire not. I am well
 When you are well. I do but grieve to see
 My princess, born to reign in every breast,
 And better all she sees, sit here without
 One heart to teach or touch save hearts of stone.
 'Tis that which breaks my own.

BLANCHE.

Grieve not for me,

Good girl. I, too, at first, fancied the hours
 Must weigh upon the prisoner heavily :
 That all around me, grown familiar soon,
 Would pall upon the eye : that want of life
 And interchange of varied thought, would leave
 An aching void in every day's desires.
 But all such apprehensions are long gone.
 Hearts are less slowly tutored than we think
 To bear the lot that fortune's hand assigns,
 If we but take it meekly. Those dark rocks,
 Those blue and mighty mountains, and the clouds
 That flit across their bosoms, and the gleams
 That diadem their ancient heads with rays,
 Seem to hold daily commune with my thoughts,
 Like old friends talking of the early days,
 When every daisy was a miracle.
 My hope in God, my love of his bright works,
 Can never leave my heart all desolate !
 But go, good girl ; my hours are not so dull
 As you perchance have thought. [Exit MAID.

BLANCHE (*after a moment's pause*).

Nor am I e'er

So little lonely as when I'm alone :
 The busy memories of one most dear
 Surround me then, thronging the vacant space
 With moving images of all he does.
 Thinks, feels, endures, for her imprison'd here.
 Still does he love me ?—Yes ! I will believe—
 Nay ! 'Twere unworthy now to hold a doubt.
 My ears were witness to the right he did me,
 And those dear sounds have charm'd captivity
 Through many a heavy hour.

[While she speaks the COUNT enters behind, disguised as a pilgrim.]

Francis of Foix,
Couldst thou but know my comfort in those words—
But who is here?

[The COUNT advancing, and kneeling at her feet.]

COUNT.

Dost thou forgive me, Blanche?
Dost thou forgive an act of seeming rashness,
Risking at once discovery of my love,
To set the loved one free?

BLANCHE (*agitated*).

Oh, can you doubt?

COUNT.

Yet hear, dear Blanche! Beneath the sun there shines
No jewel rare I covet as this hand. oooooew
Yet do not deem that, for my brightest hopes,
I would take vantage from the wrong they do thee,
To win that hand more easily! Hear, then!
And trust me, Blanche.

BLANCHE.

And I do trust thee, Francis.

COUNT.

'Tis not alone to sun me in thine eyes
For a brief hour of joy that brings me hither:
I come to free thee, dear one! All prepared
For instant flight, promises safe escape:
But, ere thou go'st, remember, by that act,
Thou dost decide thy fate and mine for ever.
Think not, beloved, it is passion speaks,
But for thine own pure name; a name become
Dear to my bosom as a soldier's honour:
I urge thee to remember, if thou fliest,
As Heaven forbid thou shouldst not! thou must give,
Without or pause, or fear, or preparation,
This hand, this best of boons, to one whom still
Thou mayst regard with doubt and fear.

BLANCHE.

Oh no!

Both doubt and fear are dead! Another time

I'll tell thee how these great foes were subdued !
 Suffice it for me now, without false shame,
 To say I ne'er can fear while I but know
 Thine arm protects me and thine honour guards.

COUNT.

Dear Blanche, thou do'st me right, and only right !
 Wert thou to wander with me through the world
 Alone and unprotected, wrong'd by those
 God gave thee for thy succour, safe—oh safe,
 As sister or as child--from deed, or word,
 Or thought that could offend thee, shouldst thou be !
 But oh, remember ! in times gone, I've done
 To my own name foul wrong ; and thou must give
 A right, holy and pure, to guard and guide thee,
 Lest, from my follies past, men's tongues should take
 Occasion to fix slanders on thy name.
 If thou fliest with me, Blanche—and thou wilt fly—
 At the first village or the loneliest shrine,
 Where'er the altar's service may be found,
 This hand, by vows clear and irrevocable,
 Must be fast link'd to mine—

[BLANCHE covers her face with her hand, and sinks back
 into her chair.

COUNT (*kneeling beside her*).

Thou turnest pale ;
 The colour comes and goes upon thy cheek.

BLANCHE.

'Tis nothing ! nothing ! It will pass away !

COUNT.

Oh doubt me not, dear Blanche ! Oh doubt me not !
 Couldst thou but tell how alter'd is this heart,
 How changed each feeling by its love for thee,
 Thou wouldst not doubt me ; thou wouldst then believe,
 That, though the time has been when fame for evil
 Was no unpleasing sound to my vain ear,
 I now as soon would have men call me coward,
 As act of mine should stain thine honour'd name.

BLANCHE (*earnestly*).

I know it ! Oh, I know it ! I have heard—
 When thou didst think no ears but scoffers heard—
 Thy generous lips do justice to poor Blanche :

And her heart thanked thee, Francis ! Yes ! I know
 That thou wilt love me, that thou wilt be true ;
 That, when Blanche gives her happiness to thee
 In charge—as men, parting for distant lands,
 Give their best treasures to some well-trying friend—
 Thou, faithful to the trust, will keep it sure,
 That no grain be diminish'd in thy hands.
 I doubt no more ! Oh no, I doubt no more !

COUNT.

Then wherefore hesitate ? Then wherefore fear ?

BLANCHE.

I did not hesitate ; I was but moved !
 If I turn pale, it is not that I doubt.
 Oh, Francis, with weak hearts like that of woman,
 Emotion often changes looks with fear.

COUNT (*embracing her*).

Then thou art mine, beloved ; and thy love
 Shall ever be the safeguard of my heart.
 Before another day goes down, the vow
 Shall bind us at the altar heart to heart.
 Here unto thee—here, in the sight of Heaven,
 Which sees us both, I take a wider vow—
 To dedicate existence unto thee ;
 As thou hast changed my nature and my heart,
 To make thy happiness that heart's sole object ;
 Not merely to repay thee love for love,
 But to exceed all thou canst feel or show ;
 And for this joyful moment to pay back—
 Oh, price inadequate !—a life of love,
 My Blanche ! my beautiful ! my own !
*]She bends her head down upon his shoulder, but starts
 at the step of the Maid.*

BLANCHE.

They come !

(*Enter MAID.*)

COUNT.

'Tis but the girl ! I saw her as I pass'd.
 Hie thee, good Bertha ; bring those pilgrims' gowns
 I cast down in the anteroom. Is all
 The rest prepared ?

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MAID (*going out, and returning with disguises*).

All's ready, my good lord !

Here are the gowns ! Nay, fear not, lady dear !

The heart says Yes, though lips, perchance say No !

COUNT.

Hush, hush ! She says not No. There is no risk,

Nor any cause for fear. Three comrades tried

Still keep the captain of the hold below,

Pouring forth revel cups to idle toasts.

I left him with a rolling, glassy eye,

And tongue too big for utterance ; but, ere that,

Upon pretence of needful haste, I gain'd

This pass under his hand ; at which the gates

Must needs be open'd at whatever hour

May please me to go forth with all my train.

There is no limit to the number given.

The night which shall conceal us must be nigh ;

For lo, where that high cloud above the hill

Grows rosy with the sun, which sets far off,

Hid by the mountains from our eyes ! More red

And redder still it glows, while we see naught

To call those blushes up, like some fair cheek

Colouring at a distant signal, known

To one fond ear, but heard by it alone.

Now fades the red away again, as if

Emotion made the very vapour pale. [*Stage grows dark.*

How the shades creep upon us in these hills !

Stay ; I will see if all is safe below.

My comrades at a sign will steal away

As if to rest.

[*Going, he pauses to listen ; distant sound without.*

COUNT.

But hark, what sound is that ?

A horse's feet coming at hottest speed.

BLANCHE (*sadly*).

'Tis all in vain ! Thine absence from the court

Has told enough. Fly, Francis ! fly, beloved !

COUNT.

What, without thee ? Cast on the cloak, dear Blanche :

We still have time ! The captain's senses reel'd

When last I left him. Now they've fallen outright.

My comrades wait us. In the dell below
 Full twenty sturdy men at arms lie hid,
 Waiting the lord whom they have often follow'd
 To deeds more perilous than these, my Blanche.
 Let us but reach them; and, in these defiles,
 If any snatch thee from beneath this sword,
 Laugh thou a name, renowned once, to scorn!
 Call my good lance a bulrush! and declare
 That love, the prince of victory, has made
 Francis of Foix a spinner at a wheel!
 Hark, the sounds near us, winding round the hill;
 A moment's hesitation ruins all.

[*Casting the cloak over her.*

This once I rule thee, gentle Blanche. Fear not,
 But thy sweet rule shall have its triumph soon.

[*Exeunt. As they go out, a trumpet sounds.*

SCENE III.

A Mountain Scene, very barren. The Castle of Llanora in the distance, with bright lights seen passing along the casements. Trumpets.

Enter the COUNT of FOIX, BLANCHE of NAVARRE, Maid, Gentlemen attending the COUNT, Men at Arms, &c., in haste.

THE COUNT (*looking round and drawing his sword*).

We must stand here! [*Trumpets.*] They come upon us close!

The ground beyond is open. Gaspard, hark!

[*To one of the Men at Arms.*

Lead on the lady where the horses stand;
 And guide her quickly o'er the frontier line!
 My cousin, D'Albret, cannot be far off,
 And the pick'd band I bade him bring with him.

BLANCHE.

Francis, I will not leave thee! Even here
 I'll stand, and see thee do great deeds, and win,
 Or I'll die with thee if thou winnest not:

For well I know that, with a stake like this,
Nothing but death will bear thy good blade down.

[*Trumpets.*]

COUNT.

Away, away, beloved! Wouldst thou, Blanche,
My looks should turn to thee, and leave my breast
A mark for every adverse sword to strike!
Away, sweet girl! These are no scenes for thee!
Scarce half a furlong off the horses stand.
Not far beyond thou'lt find another troop
Of my brave soldiers! Send them quickly down
To aid their lord. Fear not! All will go well!
Adieu, adieu, sweet girl!

[*He embraces her. Exeunt BLANCHE, weeping, and GASPARD.*]

COUNT (*looking up to Heaven*).

And she is gone!

Say, holy Heaven, shall we e'er meet again?
Oh yes! oh yes! The strong right arm of God,
Mighty to right the wrong'd, shall strike for me,
And win the battle for the pure and good! [*Trumpets.*]
Take vantage there, my men! defend the pass
Round yon sharp rock! Down the steep precipice,
Into the river, plunge the rasher men
That tempt the brink! The rest stand firmly there!

[*Exeunt. Men at Arms passing around the various parts of the rocks. Alarums and charges on the trumpets sounded. Two or three pass over the stage fighting hand to hand: among the rest, the COUNT of FOIX and a Navarrese Officer. Fresh parties of the COUNT'S troops appear, driving the Navarrese before them. Retreat sounding as the drop scene falls.*]

ACT V.

SCENE I.

A Cave in the mountains. BLANCHE, the Maid, and afterward the PRIEST, as a Hermit. Thunder and lightning.

BLANCHE.

Methinks the storm grows worse and worse each hour
Now Heaven protect the good man on his way!

Yet wherefore doubt it? Shall the arm that hurls
The leven bolts not hurl those bolts aright?
But hark, he comes. [Enter PRIEST, as a Hermit.

Good father, welcome back!

My heart sunk for thee when I heard the roar
Following close upon the fiery dart
Of the fell lightning. Not that I did doubt
God's special rule; but 'twas that thou hadst gone,
In the fierce storm, to ease this aching heart,
By gaining tidings of last night's events.

PRIEST.

I fear'd not, lady! Not too confident,
But well prepared in hope and trust, I went,
Marking the way, until I reach'd the spot
Where your poor jennet, that the lightning smote,
Lay a sad sight, with all its grace relax'd,
Its fiery strength all motionless and gone.
There found I marks of many another steed,
As if some party mounted had stood round
To view the spot. The horses' feet I traced
To the small village two leagues hence, and there
Heard how the count had come in search of you.

BLANCHE (*eagerly*).

But was he safe, good father; all unhurt?
For well I know no wound that could be borne
Would stop him now.

PRIEST.

Yes, yes! He was unhurt!
Except the gnawing wound of anxious care,
No wound had he. At the small hostelry
He stay'd, and questions manifold he ask'd,
Which they could answer not. Then angrily,
The people said, for one named Gaspard call'd he,
Reproaching him for leaving his high charge,
And coming back, though 'twas to bring him succour.
In a word, quickly he journey'd forward.
But there all trace was lost; and I return'd,
Joyful enough, to tell that he is safe!

BLANCHE.

A moment past, that word had been enough
For my heart also! Now I'd fain know more.
God give me counsel how I shall act next!

PRIEST.

By humble lips he gives it ; even mine !
 Lady, set out this very hour, before
 The quick pursuers come. The frontier pass'd
 Shall give you safety ; for, at no great distance,
 Between Toulouse and Tarbes, the French king's camp
 Still lies. Seek you his presence. He is just,
 Good, noble, Christian. Bid him right your wrongs,
 Or at the least protect you !

BLANCHE (*sadly*).

Oh, good father,
 Bethink thee what a camp may be to one
 Who comes, as I come, without friend or pass,
 Seeking my way mid ribald soldiery !
 Shall I the king's pavilion ever reach ?
 If there, how find an entrance ? Who'll believe
 It is the Princess of Navarre that comes
 On foot, without attendants, wo-begone,
 With weary limbs, and garments travel-stain'd ?
 The brutal guards may drive me from the tent ;
 Coarse jibes and jests may set my cheek afire ;
 No secure place shall cover my tired head,
 And my distress shall make the swordsmen's sport.
 Fruitless, but in the fruit of grief, I'd go ;
 And fruitless, but in bitter fruit, return !

PRIEST.

I will go with thee, daughter. It may be
 A bitter task that thou shalt undertake :
 Pain may befall thee, anguish wring thy heart,
 And generous indignation fire thy cheek ;
 But greater anguish were it far, to think,
 In years to come, that thou didst now forego
 The only means to save the man thou lovest !
 Nay, start not, lady, at the words I speak !
 I've said it, and those words are very true.
 Unto thy brother's court the count has gone,
 Misled by false reports that thou hadst turn'd
 Thy steps in that direction. If I know
 The power there ruling, he had better far
 Have tried the fiery furnace, or the den
 Of angry lions, like the captive prophet.
 I had not told thee this : but—

BLANCHE.

Oh ! no more !

It is enough, good father! Let us go!
 Womanly fear and bashfulness, adieu!
 My cause is just, my heart, too, shall be firm. [*Exeunt.*]

SCENE II.

A large Gothic Hall in the Palace of Pampeluna. A bar, as for a court, running across. The States of Navarre sitting. The KING on the throne: the CHANCELLOR of Navarre on the right near the bar, but within it. A crowd of People on either side of the Stage near the bar, but without the space appropriated to the States, and nearer to the Audience. The COUNT of FOIX disguised among the crowd.

CHANCELLOR (*addressing the States*).

This impost has the king, with your consent,
 Most excellent, confirm'd and order'd!
 All laws, as you have seen, are made more strict,
 To punish the offences which may call
 Heaven's vengeance on our heads, if not soon check'd!
 One edict but remains, on which I claim
 Your prompt obedience to your sovereign's will.
 'Tis one, indeed, forbidding all discussion,
 As it affects his crown and person more
 Than any common int'rest of the land. [*Murmurs.*]

CHANCELLOR.

Silence among the people! Hark! my lords;
 The formal words and language of this law
 Are needless to repeat. Thus runs the title:
 [*He reads.*] "Philip the King, and his good states, to all
 His faithful subjects: An edict to deprive
 Blanche of Navarre, her children and her heirs,
 For evermore of every right and title
 To the succession of these realms; of all
 Part, share, or portion, claim or right unto
 The rich possessions of the king her father;
 And to declare that princess dead in law,
 And fallen from all her honours!"

PERSONS IN THE CROWD (*clamorously*).

Out on it!

Fy! fy! shame, shame! out on it! shame!
Our native princess! What! the Princess Blanche!
Out on the dotard! shame!

AN OLD DEPUTY OF THE STATES (*when silence is restored*).

This is, my lord,
A harsh and odious thing, which must be weigh'd!
For though we own all duty to our lord,
The nobles of Navarre can never see
Such stern acts dealt against their native princess,
And put upon the record of the states,
Without some powerful motive, well approved,
Inscribed therewith, to justify the deed.

CHANCELLOR.

Motive! What motive to a loyal subject
But the king's will is needed? But if more
Were wanting here; if more were claim'd by men,
Headstrong and hard-mouth'd, keen to disobey,
Motives enough, not difficult to find,
Could be alleged for this most righteous act.

ONE OF THE DEPUTIES.

Speak, my good lord! We long to know those motives!

CHANCELLOR.

Alas! alas! that I of all men living
Should be call'd forth by duty to declare
The bitter shame brought on my master's house!
Why should you ask for motives? Is there one
Here present ignorant, that she who held
So high a station in the thoughts of men,
Has lost that estimation by such deeds
As well might shame a wanton? Was she not,
By her kind brother's care, removed from scenes
In which her conduct proved that danger lurk'd,
To a calm home, whence lately she escaped—
Though treated with all tenderness—to fly
With her false paramour, the Count of Foix?

(A VOICE *from among the crowd*.)

'Tis false as hell!

[The KING starts up: but the CHANCELLOR interposes, pointing to the spot whence the voice proceeded.]

CHANCELLOR.

Arrest him, officer!

Seize on yon traitor, who has dared to give
The lie unto his sovereign's solemn charge
Here made with heartfelt agony, against
A misled sister, loved, ah! but too well.
Seize on that man, I say, who dares declare
Blanche of Navarre has not disgraced her name
By flying as the wanton paramour
Of a French minion!

THE COUNT (*advancing through the crowd, and throwing off his disguise*).

It is false as hell!

Caitiff, I tell you it is false as hell!
Profligate churchman! Poor degraded king!
I tell ye both, your reptile charge is false:
I, Count of Foix, here give you both the lie
Unto your beards; hurl back upon your heads
Your slanders; and call Heaven to witness
How ye belie the good, the pure, the true!

CHANCELLOR (*in a calm tone, after whispering to an Officer behind him*).

My Lord of Foix, your presence here to-day
May well surprise us all, having good cause
To judge that you had quitted this poor realm!

COUNT.

Cause! I tell thee thou hast none but malice,
For all that drops like poison from thy tongue.

CHANCELLOR.

Since you are here, however, we must now
Suspend our judgment, and adjourn the States
To give more time for calm investigation.

'Tis happy, I may say, most happy, sir,

That you have come. We shall have ample time—

[*While the CHANCELLOR speaks, the Officers come round, mingling with the crowd behind the COUNT.*]

CHANCELLOR (*raising his hand suddenly*).

Now! now!

[*The Officers seize the COUNT.*]

CHANCELLOR.

Yes, happy 'tis you're come, I say,

F

Noble Lord Count of Foix, to meet at once
The due reward and thanks for all the deeds,
The chivalrous deeds, with which you've graced our
land:

The soldiers of the king assail'd and slain :
His sister basely carried off, seduced :
His frontier castles, as a spy, examined,
To give the foe a picture of their weakness !
However high your rank, my lord, be sure
That neither station, graces, nor renown,
Alliances with kings, nor warlike fame,
Shall shield your head from justice in Navarre !
Take him away !

THE COUNT (*suddenly casting off the hands of the Officers
and advancing to the bar*).

King Philip of Navarre !

Another word or two shall still be heard
By these thy nobles sitting round thee here.
I am a sovereign prince as well as thou art,
Equal in blood and higher in renown :
For what thou'st suffer'd to be done this day
In thine abused name, honour cries " Shame !"
Here on thy throne, amid thy gallant peers,
With all Navarre to witness, I proclaim,
Coward as well as liar is thy name !
False friend ! base brother ! discourteous gentleman !
In thy poor heart, if one drop of high blood,
From noble race derived, beats still for fame,
Thou wilt know how to answer this defiance
[*The Officers again attempt to seize him.*]

COUNT.

Off with your hands ! Lead on ; but touch me not ;
Lest I should do an action I might rue,
And strike, perchance, the pitiful instrument.

[*Exeunt COUNT and Officers.*]

CHANCELLOR (*rising*).

Away, away ! The session is adjourn'd !
The king will ponder o'er these sad events :
By him alone can they be judged aright.

[*Exeunt.*]

SCENE III.

A Dungeon in the prisons of Pampeluna. The COUNT; a Jailer.

COUNT (*musings*).

To-morrow, did you say? That's soon, indeed!
To-morrow! The last morrow I shall see!

[*Looks down in thought.*]

JAILER (*watching him*).

He is moved! More than I thought to see him!
Why, sir, I've heard that, in the battle-field,
You often have met death. Men say your eye
Can gaze upon the coming lance's point,
Borne at full gallop 'gainst your steady breast,
And never wink. Then why should you fear death?

COUNT (*calmly*).

There must be such a thing as fear, 'tis true,
For I have seen it blanch the cheek, and shake
The sinewy hand of men robust and bold,
When some strange portent or unusual sight
Has come upon them. Strange I never felt it!
I feel it not e'en now, my friend: and yet
Death, in the midst of life's most sunny day,
Is a dark thing to think of. As for the time,
Its shortness leaves no hope to meet again,
On this side of the grave, those I most love.
Nor, if yon gloomy court must be the place
Where this foul murder is to be achieved,
Can the beloved learn for livelong years
The fate of him thus lost.

JAILER.

Sir, if you mean

Our own sweet princess—

COUNT.

'Twas of her I spoke!

Merciful Heaven! what will become of her,
Without protection left, or hope, or love?
These are the things that make death terrible!*

* I believe I have borrowed this line from some other writer; but, with this acknowledgment made, I shall not scruple to retain it, as it serves to express my meaning exactly.

JAILER.

There is a rumour, current in the city,
That, in a neighbouring village, she was seen
As late as yesterday ; and it is said
Don Ferdinand de Leyda has engaged,
If she seek refuge with his sister Marian,
To bring her to the presence of the king.

COUNT (*vehemently*).

He will not do it ! He is tried and true !
And yet, what will not royal smiles produce ?
The same bright sun that makes the flower expand,
Hatches the reptile's egg, and nourishes
The poisonous weed upon the richest land.
May Heaven's right arm protect her ! This proved
weak !

Oh that some friend to virtue wrong'd would bear
To that sweet lady, with a cautious tongue,
The tidings of my fate, when in death's sleep
I lie, and his dull hand has blotted out,
At length, the thought of her.

JAILER.

Take comfort, sir,
In that, at least. By high command, I hear,
The scaffold in the public square is raised ;
'Tis thought with the intent to lure her forth
From her safe refuge. They judge she will risk
All things to say farewell to one she loves.

COUNT.

Forbid it, Heaven ! Oh fiends ! Such hellish art
Will call down vengeance on them at the last !
To wring so gentle and so true a heart !
Shame be upon them (*a large bell rings*). Hark ! there
sounds a bell !
Why turn'st thou pale ?

JAILER.

I did not look for that !
Offer some prayers to Heaven, my lord ! That bell
Hangs by the secret passage from the palace.
Twice have I known it ring at this dread hour,
And twice a soul took speedy flight from earth. [*Exit.*]

COUNT.

Then be it so ! Twelve hours of care or sleep,

Who would regret them ? Thy just will be done,
 Merciful God ! Yet bless thou, oh Almighty !
 Her whose dear voice, beneath thy sovereign will,
 Has been to me as that of guardian angel,
 Sent from thy throne on message of beneficence
 Unto an erring heart ! Why should I fear ?
 Thou wilt not leave the messenger who brought
 A spirit lost, back to the better way,
 Without thy great protection.

Enter QUEEN."

[The COUNT suddenly stops, and she gazes at him for a moment in silence.

ISABEL (*slowly*).

'Tis long, my lord, since we have met alone ;
 And with what different feelings do we meet,
 To those we knew in happier hours long past !

COUNT.

Lady, you look upon a dying man !
 To-morrow, if I've heard aright, the will
 Of this land's king—or of yourself ; for you
 Most likely bear the sceptre in Navarre—
 Dooms me unto the sword. Not that high sword
 Which right and even-handed equity
 Bear but to smite the guilty, but the sword
 Which private passion sways to murderous ends.
 Fain would I, lady, now prepare to die :
 And though, with reverence and grief, I might
 Hear my confessor catalogue my sins,
 Yet would I willingly not have them named
 By one who haply had a share in them !

ISABEL (*after gazing on him sternly*).

Oh ! Count of Foix, who led me so to share ?

THE COUNT.

I will not say one word in my defence,
 Which, Isabel, your ears could hear with pain.
 I know that *I* am guilty ; judge not you ;
 But, self-condemn'd, bow lowly to my God,
 Grieving for my own deeds. Let us not think,
 In this dark hour, of aught but of repentance !
 Why you vouchsafe to visit this sad cell
 I know not, madam ; but, I beseech you,
 Disturb not now the heavy thoughts of one
 Preparing for his death.

ISABEL.

Why do I come ?

Because, within my bosom, there are thoughts
Of happier days than these ; and softness steals
Upon the steps of recollected love,
And turns revenge to weakness. Life I bring ;
To you I offer it ! But there must be
Conditions to the boon !

COUNT.

Then speak them, lady !

Let me know the terms ! I ne'er was found
Fearful of death, or clinging to this life,
Of tenure most uncertain, joys most fleeting.
Yet will I not Heaven's good gift cast away,
Like a child playing with an unknown gem.
But your conditions must be no way hard ;
For that said jewel, life, is a bright toy,
Worth some defence, and of a certain price ;
Yet still that price is ascertain'd and clear,
And I am no such spendthrift to give more
Than the true value ! May I crave to know
The sum of these conditions !

ISABEL (*sternly*).

By your tone,

I think you mock me ! These are the conditions :
You shall renounce your idle paramour,
Blanche of Navarre ; shall swear to see her face
No more in life ; shall openly avow—

COUNT.

Hold, lady, hold ! Add not another word
To bring fresh shame upon the lip that speaks it.
Blanche of Navarre I never will renounce !
Nor ever swear to see her face no more !
God and my honour against vows like these !
If life be given me, I will use that life
To seek her o'er the earth. In that whole life
Still will I love her : in death love her still :
Long as existence shall endure—the same
From this sad moment to the last dark point
Of the uncertain future—every thought,
Save those that turn to Heaven, shall still be hers !
Her love my sov'reign antidote shall be
'Gainst pain and sorrow. Even death itself
Shall lose its terrors in the thought of her ;

And when your vengeance o'er this mortal life
 Achieves its triumph, memory of her
 Shall win a better victory. Her love
 Shall give me courage, give me strength and peace ;
 Her virtue guide me up on high ; and Heaven
 Seem brighter for the hope of meeting her !

ISABEL (*approaching the door of the cell, and striking it violently with her hand*).

Thy fate is chosen ! Be it as thou wilt !

[*The door opens, showing the Jailer and a Maid.*
 Thou scorn'st my kindness ! Thou hast scorn'd my love !
 Now thou shalt try my hate ! Within these walls
 They told thee thou shouldst die. They told thee false !
 No such calm death for thee ! The public axe,
 Stain'd with the blood of every common crime ;
 The vulgar butcher and the grinning crowd ;
 The people, thinking thou art pale with fear,
 Shall greet thee on the scaffold. Everything
 To make death shameful, terrible, and dark,
 Shall fall upon thee in the hour of fate.
 Blanche of Navarre if thou dost think of then,
 Neither shall Isabel forgotten be !
 Oh, fool that I have been !

[*She turns towards the door, and sees the Jailer and the Maid gazing upon her.*

Open the door !

Why stare you, minion ? Be you blind and dumb !
 Or there are means shall quickly make you so.
 And you, too, keeper of these silent halls,
 There's gold for you ! and yet remember well
 There is a place more silent than e'en this !
 Lead on, I say ! Why waste ye moments now ? [*Exeunt.*

SCENE IV.

Great Square before the Palace of Pampeluna. The perspective of a long street ; a scaffold with a block and axe, a raised seat being near it for the KING, with a lattice window above, where faces gazing out are seen from time to time.

KING of NAVARRE, CHANCELLOR, Guards, Pages, and other Attendants, with the people to witness the execution. On

the scaffold, not too high, the COUNT of FOIX, two Executioners, a Priest. Guards near the scaffold; a Herald.

[The COUNT rises from his knees, and bows his head to the Priest.]

COUNT.

I thank you, father! You have bid me trust
In an all-seeing Judge, whose righteous will
Shall yield a sentence different from this
Which now the herald reads. Mark these false words!
[Flourish of trumpets.]

HERALD (*reads from a scroll*).

Hear! all men, hear! Sir Francis, Count of Foix,
Traitor against our sovereign lord the king!
Tried well and duly by a special court,
Under the great seal of Navarre! condemn'd
For having enter'd privily this land;
For having, on the errand of a spy,
Visited forts and castles of Navarre;
For having waged unlawful war, and slain
The subjects of Navarre, no war declared;
And more, for having, by arts dark and false,
Poison'd the pure mind of the Princess Blanche,
And from her natural guardians her convey'd;
For these, and many trait'rous acts beside,
Condemn'd to block and axe: bow down your head!
And Heaven have mercy on your sinful soul!
[Flourish of trumpets.]

COUNT (*advancing to the front of the scaffold*).

Now let *me* speak! Men of Navarre, ye hear!
And by your silent presence give consent
Unto a deed unworthy of this land!
Unto a charge false, foul, and slanderous!
Unto a sentence lawless, shameless, base!
Stranger amid you, I might well have hoped
That some one—but in common courtesy—
Of the renown'd nobles of the land,
Would have stood forth to see that bold power took
The course of even justice in her dealings
With one all powerless to resist.

[Murmurs among the people.]

FIRST VOICE.

Shame! Shame!

They have used him ill!

SECOND VOICE.

Set him free, good king!

THIRD VOICE.

Wrong has been done him! [A distant trumpet.

COUNT.

Silence, I pray you!

Lo! They're impatient to behold my blood!
 I must not tarry: hear me one word more:
 That, all forsaken in my utmost need,
 Iniquity was left to do her will
 With no opposing voice, I do forgive
 So far as I alone am injured: but
 Who shall forgive you, if you do not right
 To her, the beautiful, the bright, the good;
 Belied by those whose hearts' blood should be given
 To shield and guard her, and uphold her cause?

[A distant trumpet.

Blanche of Navarre! Blanche of Navarre! the weight,
 The heaviest weight upon my weary heart,
 Is that the vices of my former days,
 Vices thy virtues shamed away for ever,
 Should give unworthy enemies a plea
 To darken thy bright name. Oh, do her right,
 Men of the land, if you have honour left!
 Blanche of Navarre! Blanche of Navarre! if here
 There be but one good soul and noble heart,
 Oh, let him tell thee, when these lips are closed,
 That with my latest words, with my last breath,
 And the departing effort of a spirit
 Boon for a world of truth, I did thee right!
 Proclaim'd thee pure, as pure I know thou art,
 And died defending thee from calumny!

[Trumpets behind the scenes.

[Enter quickly DON FERDINAND DE LEYDA. Many Guards
 bearing French banners: in the midst a litter with closed
 curtains. The litter is set down near the KING's throne.

KING (*angrily*).

What have we here? How now, Don Ferdinand?

BLANCHE (*throwing back the curtains*).

My brother's voice! Where am I?

[She gazes round her, sees the scaffold, and then, with
 a shriek, rushes into the arms of the COUNT, the peo-
 ple making way for both to advance and meet. Shouts

*from the people, and swords drawn among them,
while the French guards press on round the scaffold.*

KING.

Don Ferdinand de Leyda, what may mean
This treacherous coming in of foreign forces ?

CHANCELLOR.

How is it that in arms, Don Ferdinand,
You dare present yourself where solemn justice
Performs her last sad act ?

COUNT (*with his left hand round BLANCHE, clasping her to
his heart*).

Now let me die !

For, from its treasury of joys, Eternity
Scarce can produce another hour like this !

DON FERDINAND (*to the KING*).

Sire, I beseech you, as you value honour,
Safety, and peace, let them forbear at once
This bloody act !

*Enter ISABEL from behind the throne, her hair dishevelled,
and her dress in disarray.*

ISABEL (*to the KING*).

What is it I have seen !

Will you be bearded at your palace gate,
Your sceptre trampled on, your crown contemn'd ?
If you're a man, speak but one needful word !
Shall he escape you, when a breath will bring
The axe upon his neck ? Speak, speak, my lord,
If there still live one unextinguish'd spark
Of royal fire within your breast ; speak, speak !
Silent ? Then I will speak it : strike, I say !
Down with the traitor's head ! Strike, headsman,
strike !

Dost thou, slave, disobey ?

DON FERDINAND (*to the KING*).

I pray you, sire,

Bid yon coarse butcher leave his slaughtering stage,
And break those shackles from the good count's hands.
You mark the people ; swords are drawn all round ;
I—I alone here present—am unarm'd,
Not venturing to come into your presence
With weapons in my hand ; and these that follow
Are not my vassals. They are the escort

Of your beloved sister, sent with her
By your most mighty friend, the King of France.

[*The KING makes a sign to the Executioner, who lets
the axe fall beside the block, and descends.*]

I promised, sire, to bring the Lady Blanche
Into your presence, if on her return
She sought my sister's dwelling : she is here !
My promise is redeem'd. But I am charged
By Charles the Dauphin, who now occupies
The passes with the army, to demand,
Free and uninjured at your hands, his cousin
Francis of Foix. He also sent a threat,
Painful for me to speak. It must be told !
He says, that if the menaced blow have fallen,
He'll take the crown from off your head, and lay
This capital in ashes ere a week.

KING.

Thou hearest, Isabel.

ISABEL (*with frantic vehemence*).

Ay, well ! Coward ! Fool !

If thou wouldst e'er regain the name of man,
Do on thine armour ! mount thy horse ! and call
Thy barons to thine aid ! Put yon light girl
Into some holy house ! Pour out at once
Her foul seducer's blood ! and, setting up
The head of yon arch traitor o'er the gates
To welcome here the French allies he speaks of,
Lead forth your knights and nobles to defend
Your kingly rights, and their own native land !

DON FERDINAND.

Madam, the project, goodly as it is,
Alas ! cannot succeed.

ISABEL.

Why not, false traitor ?

Thou tremblest for thy head ! Why not, I say ?

DON FERDINAND (*taking a parchment from a Page*).

For this plain reason, madam, and none else :
The nobles of Navarre—their names are all
Sign'd here below—by my weak voice declare,
Though ever ready to support their king
In equitable warfare, they will not—
No, not a man—lay lance in rest against

The power of France in an unrighteous cause.
 Set free the count; make compensation due
 For the foul wrongs he's suffer'd. Do but right
 To the pure name of our beloved princess!
 And then, a thousand weapons at a word
 Spring from the scabbard to defend our king.
 But we'll not pander to a woman's vengeance,
 Nor uphold coward slander with our swords!

ISABEL.

Hearst thou? Hearst thou? One manly act!
 Oh do one manly act, and strike him dead!
 Or let me do it! [*Catching the dagger from the KING's
 belt, and springing on DON FERDINAND.*]

[DON FERDINAND *wrenches the dagger from her, and
 casts it down with contempt.*]

DON FERDINAND.

Madam, your justice is too summary!

ISABEL (*tearing her hair, and gazing wildly round*).

Fools! madmen! cowards! traitors! Out on you!
 [*Shrieks violently, and, falling into the arms of her
 women, is carried off.*]

DON FERDINAND (*kneeling before the KING*).

My lord, we know that you have been deceived.
 Recall, I do beseech you, mighty king,
 The spirit of your youth. Oh, bid those hands
 Be taken from as noble hands as e'er
 Wielded the knightly sword, incapable
 Of treachery or wrong: and, to atone
 For all that he has suffer'd, grant, oh grant!
 The precious boon for which he has endured
 Such bitter trials: grant your sister's hand!
 Lo, how he holds her in his shackled arms
 Close to his heart! Strike off the gyves, my lord,
 And leave the princess there!

KING.

Well, be it so!
 I've been indeed deceived! Strike off the bonds!
 [*A loud shout from the people.*]

CURTAIN FALLS.



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